

'Eid Al Fitr begins Monday

AMMAN (Petra) — The first day of 'Eid Al Fitr will be observed on Monday, Jan. 18, making Sunday, Jan. 17 the last day of the Holy Month of Ramadan, according to an announcement Saturday evening by Chief Islamic Justice Sheikh Izzeddine Al Khatib Al Tamimi. Tamimi said that the new moon of Shawwal, the lunar month after Ramadan, was not spotted Saturday evening and that therefore Sunday will mark the last day of the fasting month. In his announcement, Tamimi said it is a happy occasion for the 'Eid holiday to coincide this year with His Majesty King Hussein's return to Jordan. Tamimi urged Muslims to display a true spirit of social solidarity on this occasion through charity and good deeds and through praying to God to keep King Hussein in good health.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية "الراي"

Volume 24 Number 7046

AMMAN SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1999, RAMADAN 30, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 Fils

U.N. prosecutor launches Kosovo probe

AMSTERDAM (R) — United Nations chief war crimes prosecutor Louise Arbour will head a mission to Kosovo to investigate the alleged slaughter of 45 ethnic Albanians by Yugoslav security forces, a spokesman said on Saturday. "Arbour has launched an investigation into the most recent massacre in Kosovo. She is making arrangements to head a field mission," Christian Charrier said, adding she expected to depart for Kosovo within the next 48 hours (see earlier story on page 4).

Lloyd's in Iraq to be replaced

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Independent inspection agents of Lloyd's Register will be replaced with experts from Swiss firm Cotecna from the beginning of February, a U.N. spokesman said Saturday. "The Cotecna people are already in the country and they will replace the Lloyd's agents from Feb. 1 when the contract with Lloyd's expires," said the spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian programme in Iraq, George Somerville. A total of 54 Lloyd's inspectors, under a contract with the United Nations, are posted on Iraq's land borders with Jordan, Syria and Turkey to check the imports, as well as in the Gulf port of Umm Qasr in southern Iraq.

Bombs seized in N. Ireland after attack

BELFAST (AFP) — A stockpile of petrol bombs was seized by Northern Ireland police on Saturday after a second night's attack on a Belfast police station, a spokesman said. The 31 primed bombs, together with 12 paint bombs, were found during a search operation in a hardline Catholic republican area of the city after a petrol bomb attack on the police station late on Friday night. The spokesman said officers also found a four-metre long plank of wood studded with nails which was designed to be placed on the road to puncture tires.

19 dead, 25 injured in Nepal bus crash

KATHMANDU (AFP) — At least 19 people were killed and 25 injured when a passenger bus crashed and fell into a river early Saturday, state-run radio announced. It said the bus was heading towards Gordha district from Narayan-garh when it ran off the road near Jalbire into the Trishuli River. The radio said 15 died instantly and another four while being treated for injuries at Bhanpur Hospital. Another 25 passengers were being treated for injuries, the radio said. It was not known if any foreigners were among the passengers.

Stolen Picassos, Rembrandts recovered in Spain

MADRID (AFP) — Spanish police busted a large art trafficking ring on Friday and recovered stolen works by Picasso and Rembrandt among others, police said Saturday. The bust is the "largest operation to recover part of Spain's heritage in Spanish history," a police spokesman said. The works are believed to be worth tens of billions of pesetas (60 million Euro). Some of the artworks were seized in a house in Riba-Roja, near the Mediterranean city of Valencia. Three suspected traffickers were arrested, the spokesman said, but no other details were available.

King plans review of nation's progress, challenges

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein, in an address to the nation yesterday, announced that he plans to launch a comprehensive review of the country's progress and challenges facing it.

"We should, soon, make a comprehensive review of our nation's progress and address all issues and challenges that occupy our

minds or handicap our blessed progress," the King said in a televised address from his residence in the U.K.

"Now that I have recovered fully, by the grace of God, it will be merely the

return to Amman on Tuesday after a six-month absence. King Hussein left Jordan in mid-July to undergo treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The King received a clean bill of health after six sessions of chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in the U.S.

The King announced Thursday in London that he would fly to Amman on Jan. 19. In his 20-minute speech, King Hussein praised HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, for "sparing no effort and giving generously" during the King's absence.

In a steady and calm voice, King Hussein told his people that during his treatment "my heart was never faint, my conscience knew neither impatience nor solitude, nor did my determination and hope waver." He stressed that "neither the distance nor the illness have stood between us."

After wishing all citizens a happy 'Eid Al Fitr, the King called on Jordanians to refrain from the traditional practice of using firearms to celebrate his return.

"I know that you miss me, and that you have waited a long time for this reunion. God knows how much I miss you, and how happy I am to be with you again. But let us express our joy in a civilised way free from any action that may cause even the slightest harm, or mar the happiness of any member of our great Jordanian family."

Hundreds of thousands of Jordanians are expected to throng the streets to take part in massive celebrations for the King's return. In 1992, about two mil-



People gather Saturday in Amman to watch His Majesty King Hussein in an address to the country from London (AFP photo)

lion Jordanians took to the streets to celebrate the King's homecoming after the removal of a kidney, also at the Mayo Clinic.

King Hussein also expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to all Jordanians, and the leaders, presidents, and princes of friendly and brotherly countries, and the officials and citizens "from all parts of the world who have hurried to comfort themselves regarding my condition, and to inquire after my health, or who expressed wishes and prayers for my recovery," said the King.

Prince Hassan, speaking at a tree-planting ceremony Thursday, said he is expecting "big decisions" from the King on his return home.

Upon his return to Jordan, the King is also expected to take "major internal decisions to counter corruption" and proceed with administrative reforms, a member of the King's entourage told Agence France Presse.

"The King is determined to take hold of domestic matters," the source said. In a related development, the Lower House of Parlia-

ment yesterday issued a statement on the occasion of 'Eid Al Fitr and the return of the King congratulating the Regent and the Hashemite family as well as the Jordanian people on these two occasions.

The statement said Parliament shares with Jordanians their festivities, voicing and reiterates its allegiance to the Hashemite leadership.

Parliament also stressed full support for the King-dom's principled stand vis-à-vis Arab causes (see full text of King's speech on page 7).

Israeli troops in armed incident with Palestinian police

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The Israeli army accused Palestinian police of sparking an armed incident Saturday by attempting to prevent the arrest of a woman who was acting suspiciously.

Israeli troops in a joint patrol with Palestinian police in the southern Gaza Strip tussled over the woman and an Israeli soldier fired his gun, the army said.

A few moments later a burst of automatic fire rang out from a building occu-

piated by Palestinian policemen in the area around the Gush Katif bloc of Jewish settlements.

No one was hurt in either case.

The woman, who turned out to be a police officer, tried to attack an Israeli officer with a knife, the Israeli army said.

Senior officials from both sides arrived on the scene and the woman was taken to an office of the joint Israeli-Palestinian liaison unit for questioning, it said.

Clinton pays tribute to Israeli defence minister in apparent snub to Netanyahu

Agencies

U.S. PRESIDENT Bill Clinton has sent a message to Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai praising his role in advancing the Middle East peace process in an apparent snub to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel Radio said Saturday.

"The United States and Israel can continue to trust you to advance the peace process and security in the region," the radio quoted Clinton as telling Mordechai, the cabinet's most prominent moderate.

"Goodwill and political courage are necessary to implement the Wye River agreement in its entirety despite the domestic pressures and criticisms," the message said.

The message made no direct mention of Netanyahu who last month froze implementation of the agreement Washington brokered in October cancelling a second pullback from the West Bank Israel was required to carry out.

Netanyahu's spokesman Avigdor Bushinsky dismissed the idea that the letter was a snub to Netanyahu, who

faces general elections on May 17.

"I don't see it that way. It's good that Clinton is writing letters. It should be welcomed," Bushinsky said.

But political analyst Gerald Steinberg described the message sent in recent days as an example of Clinton's partiality for Mordechai.

"It could be seen [as a snub]. They've always attempted to increase the importance of Mordechai as a means of softening or changing Netanyahu's policies," Steinberg told Reuters.

The right-wing prime minister has let it be known that

he plans no further implementation of the accord until elections for parliament and the prime minister ship in May and has set out a series of demands of the Palestinians, some of which go beyond the agreement's requirements.

Special U.S. envoy Dennis Ross on Tuesday called on both the Israelis and Palestinians to honour their commitments under the frozen land-for-security agreement.

"Clearly from our point of view it is important to have the Wye River agreement implemented by both sides," Ross told reporters after talks

with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The Israeli defence minister has maintained a careful silence about his political plans letting it be known that he will stay in Netanyahu's right-wing Likud Party for the time being but does not rule out an eventual defection.

Both Netanyahu's main challengers — opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak and the centrist former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak — have tried to persuade him to join their ticket in recent days.

U.N. Security Council fails to reach agreement on Iraq

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — At the end of a dizzying week of proposals, counterproposals, documents and deliberations, the Security Council has made little progress on Iraq and may be more divided than ever.

Council members say they are pleased and even encouraged that they are finally discussing Iraq and have proposals in hand a month after the U.S.-British air strikes ended U.N. oversight of Baghdad's weapons programmes.

But after a week of meetings and presentations on what to do next, the divisions that have crippled the Security Council for more than a year appear to have only become more defined.

The key question boils down to whether to abandon efforts to disarm Iraq or keep trying in the face of Baghdad's decision to never again allow U.N. weapons inspections.

France and Russia subscribe to the former and this week suggested a less intrusive monitoring system that would prevent Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from acquiring new weapons of mass destruction. China hasn't come forward with any written proposals but diplomats expect it will back Iraq's two other sympathisers on the council.

The United States and Britain are intent on the latter, insisting that the council follow resolutions requiring

U.N. inspectors to certify that Iraq has destroyed all its banned weapons.

It appears the one issue that nearly all five permanent and 10 nonpermanent members can agree on is that they must do something to help Iraq's 22 million people, who have been living under a U.N. oil embargo for more than eight years.

The embargo was imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

U.N. resolutions say it can be lifted only after inspectors report Iraq is disarmed.

Washington seems to have made the most surprising leap considering its hard-line approach to Baghdad. It suggested the council allow Iraq to export as much oil as it can — as long as the proceeds are used to buy food and medicine for Iraqis.

The offer, however, has its own problems. As it stands, Baghdad can't pump enough oil to reach the maximum amount authorised under the U.N. oil-for-food programme. That programme allows Iraq to export limited amounts of oil — \$5.2 billion over six months — to buy humanitarian goods for the Iraqi people.

Because of depressed oil prices and production limits in Iraq, however, Baghdad was able to export only about \$3 billion in the second half of 1998.

To try to boost exports, Washington said Friday it would release con-

New Turkish PM cites 'chill' in bilateral ties with Iraq

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's new prime minister, Bulent Ecevit, on Saturday said there is a "chill" in his country's ties with Iraq because U.S. and British forces are using the Incirlik base in southern Turkey for air patrols over Iraq.

"Our relations are no longer what they once were. There is a certain chill in our bilateral ties," Ecevit told the daily Milliyet.

Asked whether he believed the situation was a result of the U.S. and British use of the Incirlik base, Ecevit said: "Of course, they [the Iraqis] are reacting."

"I am worried that air raids will increase after the end of Ramadan," he said, referring to the four-day Operation Desert Fox in December, and the Holy Month, which will end with the sighting of the new moon, expected within the next week.

He added that he was "very concerned" about the current situation, and said he regretted that Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz had still not responded to an invitation to visit Turkey.

tracts it had held up to repair Iraq's oil infrastructure. Washington also called for automatic approval for food and medicine contracts and encouraged voluntary humanitarian contributions to Iraq.

France opened the debate with a call to lift the embargo altogether, but with controls to make sure Baghdad doesn't use the money to rebuild its weapons programmes. Russia suggested a similar scenario.

Both have economic interests in having the embargo lifted. Baghdad rejected any proposals that didn't lift all sanctions.

While diplomats were for the most part offering very diplomatic assessments of each other's proposals — "interesting," and "we're studying them," were common refrains — Deputy U.S. Ambassador Peter Burleigh had blunt words for the Russian proposal submitted Friday.

The proposal effectively says the U.N. Special Commission, which has been carrying out inspections, has no further use in Iraq.

"Of course we reject that," Burleigh said after the council broke up for the week. "The question is how to get them back into Iraq."

Discussions resume next week.

'Kurd guerrilla leader Ocalan leaves Italy'

ROME (Agencies) — Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan left Italy on Saturday, the Italian government said.

"Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, having decided to leave Italy, has been accompanied to the border," a terse two-line government statement said.

Italian media said Ocalan, leader of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) which is outlawed in Turkey, was believed to be heading for Moscow.

Ocalan arrived in Italy from Moscow on Nov. 12 and was arrested on a German warrant. Italy rejected a request to extradite him to Turkey to face treason charges because its laws ban sending back suspects who could face the death penalty. Germany finally did not request his extradition.

"He's already left. He should have even arrived," a government spokesman said. He declined to say where Ocalan was heading, saying only that he had "some doubts" that he had in fact gone to Russia.

Ocalan left in the early evening, he said.

A spokesman for the German-based DEM news agency

which is close to the PKK rebels said he was in a "safe place."

Ocalan was freed last month by a Rome appeals court. He had sought political asylum, but Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema had publicly called him a terrorist and favoured an international trial.

There have been demonstrations of support for Ocalan by Kurds in several European countries.

The PKK leader was placed under house arrest from Nov. 20 to Dec. 16 under police protection, and he stayed in a villa near Rome up to the time of his departure.

Turkey holds Ocalan responsible for the deaths of 29,000 people in a 14-year battle for self-rule in the southeast.

"The conditions for asylum did not exist. Ocalan was in effect a free man. He was free to leave the country," the Italian government spokesman said.

He added that Italy had pushed for an international trial but opposition from Turkey had prevented a decision on how the trial could be brought from being made.

Senate endorses 1999 budget, urges reforms to Income Tax Law

The verdict will be reviewed for a second time by the Court of Cassation, which will either uphold or ratify the Criminal Court's Jan. 14 ruling.

The parish will serve 1,500 Maronite adherents and will rank sixth in a list of the nine Christian churches recognised by the state under a 1958 decree issued by King Hussein.

- The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2) until Jan. '78.

AMMAN (J.T.) — Police are questioning the husband of an 18-year-old woman in connection with her accidental shooting in Jabal al-Zuhur mountains before the Ramadan iftar banquet was served on Friday, officials said Saturday.

The victim, A.Y., was allegedly shot by her husband once, one official said. The bullet penetrated her left eye before resting inside her skull.

Police said they were investigating the incident.

"Initial investigation indicates that the woman was shot by her husband who claimed that he was cleaning his gun," the official said. He said he could not give further details until the investigation was over.

'They are sitting at home doing nothing, they are not made to feel productive and have no recreational facilities' — WHO consultant

‘The elderly suffer from loneliness, boredom, anxiety and depression’ — Sawsan Majali

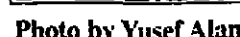
"An elderly person lives with an average number of four people, mostly with their spouses and unmarried children," said Majali. "Another 21.9 per cent live with their extended family."

tenuous circumstances, she said. Psychiatrists who visit nursing homes or provide health care when the medical need of elderly patients is often a listening ear, sometimes in the form of counselling.

ties for the elderly, and aims to develop a national plan for their care based on the Arab League's Care of the Elderly plan put forth in 1997.

Based on Majali's study, a national strategy has been developed for better

Ministry of Social Development
ed financial and administra-
rt for any organisation which
s day care activities targeting
s age group.



At least 22 Kosovo Albanians found dead

BEBUS HILL, Serbia (R) — The bodies of at least 22 ethnic Albanians, most shot through the head or neck, were found in southern Kosovo Saturday.

The victims, all men between the ages of 18 and 65, were laid out in a ditch. They were not in uniform.

A local ethnic Albanian whose father and two brothers were among the dead told Reuters at the scene that they had been arrested by police with other men from Racak village, about 25 km south of the Kosovo regional capital Pristina, Thursday night.

There was no immediate comment from the Serbian authorities.

Police and army units who had been deployed in the area Friday and had been involved in a sustained exchange of fire with ethnic Albanian guerrillas were nowhere to be seen. A police helicopter hovered overhead.

Sami Sylja, 41, told Reuters his 65-year-old father and brothers, aged 30 and 36, were among the bodies laid out in the dry bed of a stream on Bebus Hill, overlooking Racak.

"They were taken from their homes, arrested and told they would be taken to Urosevac (a nearby town)," said Sylja. "But later they were brought to the hill and executed," he said.

Two women and a young man who had three brothers among the dead were crying over the

remains, while guerrillas stood by.

International monitors were at the site and one relayed information about the bodies over a radio. "It looks like they were shot trying to escape," he said.

They then moved off to investigate other sites where local ethnic Albanians said there were more bodies. Sylja said there were more than 40 in all, but it was not possible to confirm that immediately.

Independence-minded ethnic Albanians outnumbered Serbs by nine to one in Kosovo, a southern province of Serbia where some 2,000 people were killed and a quarter of a million driven from their homes in fighting last year.

Last autumn, villagers accused Serb police of massacring two groups of ethnic Albanians whose discovery prompted NATO to threaten air strikes against Serbia. Belgrade said the killings had been staged by ethnic Albanians to goad NATO into action.

The United States brokered a ceasefire in October, but violence has escalated sharply in recent weeks.

The Serb-run Media Centre in the Kosovo capital Pristina quoted police Friday as saying at least 15 ethnic Albanian guerrillas had been killed in fighting near Racak which was witnessed earlier in the day by a Reuters reporting team.

The leading Kosovo

Albanian daily, Koha Ditore, Saturday published a denial of the Media Centre report from sources close to the guerrillas, who call themselves the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

They quoted a local KLA commander in the region as saying one guerrilla had been killed and three wounded, and that there could be civilian casualties. He also said the guerrillas had destroyed an armoured personnel carrier with police in it.

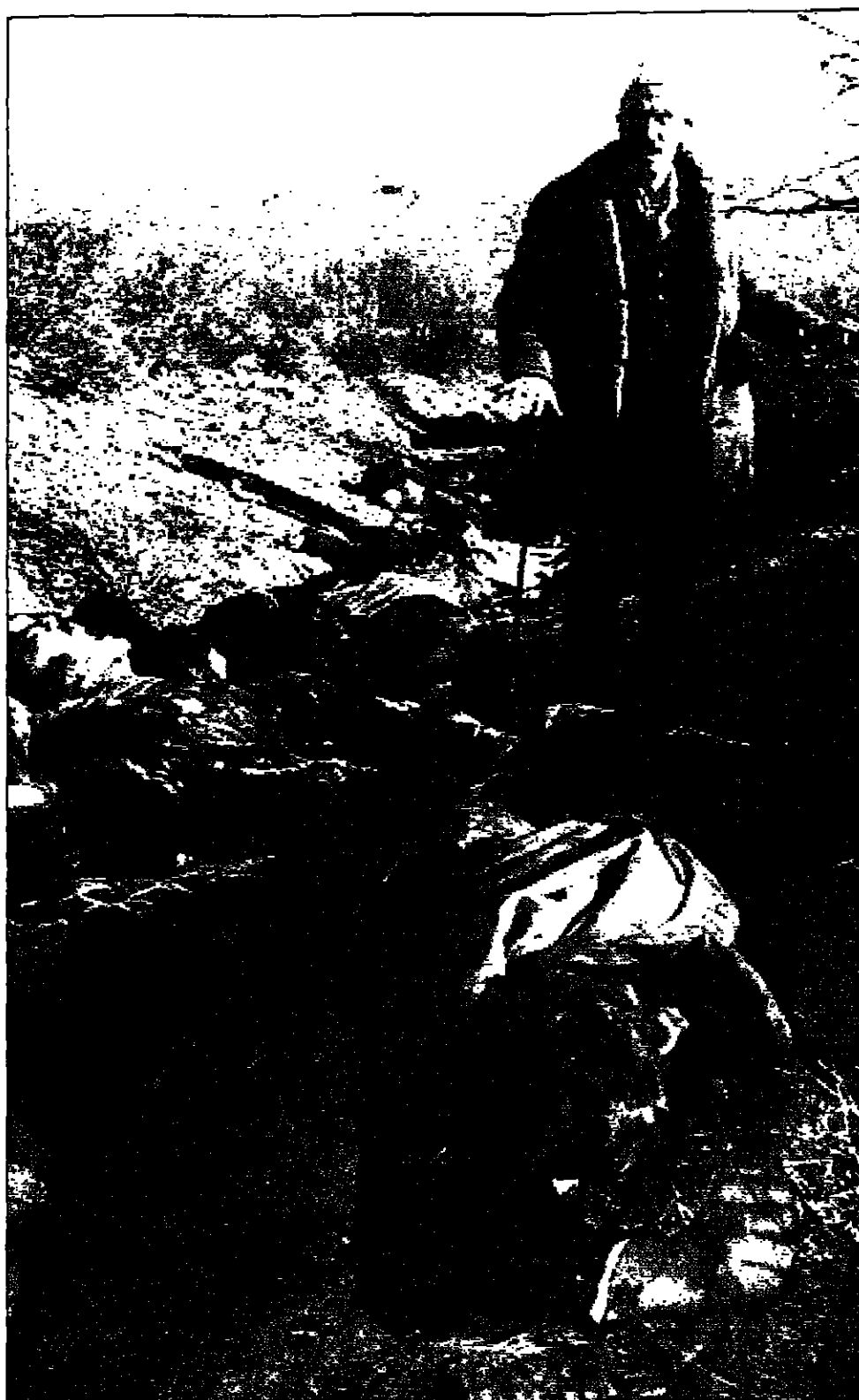
A hospital worker in Pristina told Reuters Friday a wounded policeman had been brought in from the area, where reporters saw snipers and mortars being used against the police and army, which responded with tanks and heavy machine guns.

The Media Centre had no word on police casualties from Friday's fighting in Racak and the neighbouring hamlet of Petrovo.

A spokesman for the international monitoring mission said one of its senior members had managed to stop the firing Friday afternoon. He had no word on casualties.

It was one of two outbreaks of fighting Friday. In western Kosovo, two monitors were wounded when unidentified gunmen fired repeatedly at their vehicle.

It was the first time the monitors, who have found themselves trying to shore up the ragged truce, had been shot at and wounded.



An ethnic Albanian mourns next to the bodies of at least 22 villagers from Racak which were found in a ditch on Bebus Hill, the site of recent fighting in southern Kosovo. Serbian police forces and Yugoslav army were deployed in the area Friday and had been involved in a sustained exchange of fire with ethnic Albanian guerrillas (Reuters photo)

Attack on OSCE ceasefire monitors 'deliberate'

LONDON (AFP) — The attack on two members of the OSCE in Kosovo Friday appears to have been "deliberate," the head of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), William Walker, said Saturday in an interview with the BBC.

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) spokesman Mans Nyberg had said in Vienna Friday that early indications were that the OSCE personnel had been "targeted."

The two monitors, one British and the other a locally-hired Serb interpreter, were travelling in a convoy of two armoured cars at Decane, 40 kilometres west of the Kosovo

capital Pristina when they were hit by apparent sniper fire. They were taken to hospital in Pristina where they were said to be out of danger.

Walker told the BBC: "We were three of our vehicles. They have the OSCE logo on the side. We notified everybody in the region that they were going to be going up and down on this patrol."

"What I've heard so far about the firing is it was not just one shot or two shots. It was sustained firing. That would lead me to believe it was a deliberate shooting," he said.

"Everybody in the mis-

sion is shocked that somebody would deliberately shoot at our orange vehicles knowing that we're in there and we're unarmed and we're on the mission that we're on," he added.

The incident was the first in which unarmed members of the mission have been injured since it deployed before Christmas to help shore up a fragile ceasefire in the Serbian province populated mainly by Albanians.

Nyberg commented: "This should still be seen as an isolated incident in an area which is particularly tense, so at this point it would not affect the mission as a whole."

'China building another structure on disputed Spratly reef'

MANILA (AFP) — China is building another structure on a Spratly island reef claimed by Manila and has dispatched two vessels believed to be missile frigates to back up the work, a Philippine military report obtained here Saturday said.

The incident threatens to exacerbate the tensions between Manila and Beijing, which have been strained since the discovery that China was setting up a structure on the Spratly reef.

The military report said reconnaissance flights found another concrete structure rising on Mischief Reef where China first set up a permanent structure in 1995 which was recently expanded.

The report also said the Chinese ships were seen moving at close range near three Philippine-occupied Spratly islands.

In apparent reaction to the new developments, the Philippines will increase reconnaissance patrols and may dispatch more troops to the islands it occupies.

The Chinese structures on Mischief Reef have raised concern from the Philippines, which claims the reef. The Philippines says the structures

have military purposes, although China says they are shelters for fishermen.

The new structure is on another part of the reef and not connected to the existing structures earlier built by China.

The military said two vessels were deployed in the vicinity of Mischief Reef, apparently to secure it for Chinese workers building the structure.

It did not identify the type of frigates nor say how large the new structure was.

The Spratly chain in the South China Sea is believed to sit on vast mineral resources. The islands are wholly or partially claimed by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

China's recent activities in Philippine-claimed areas prompted Manila to call for greater international attention to the issue, including supporting an international conference on the Spratlys to be attended by all claimants.

In a meeting earlier this week, Philippine Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado won the support of his U.S. counterpart, Richard Cohen, for the holding of such a multilateral meeting.

However, China has rejected

U.S. mediation, with foreign ministry spokesman Sun Yixi saying that "external interference in this matter is unacceptable and will only complicate the current situation." China has insisted that talks on the issue should be on a bilateral basis between the claimants, a situation the Philippines believes would give China an advantage.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Philippine President Joseph Estrada discussed the Spratlys on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Kuala Lumpur in November, during which they agreed to hold expert-level discussions on the issue later this year.

However the Philippines says China has yet to confirm when these discussions will take place.

The Philippines has one of the weakest militaries in the region and officials admit they have little chance of standing up to the Chinese with force, prompting the government to resort to diplomatic measures.

All claimants bar Brunei have troops stationed in the Spratly group, which some analysts say is a potential flashpoint in Asia.

Prosecutors wrapping up opening phase of their case

WASHINGTON (AP) — After alleging that Bill Clinton "violated the laws of this land," prosecutors at the president's impeachment trial are set to argue that his conduct amounted to "high crimes and misdemeanours" warranting his removal.

As the proceedings in the U.S. Senate stretched into the weekend, senators were considering whether to invite the president to testify and summon several of his close aides and associates as witnesses.

Republican lawmakers from the House of Representatives were presenting their third and final day of opening arguments Saturday. The Senate is serving as a jury in the trial, required following a House vote to impeach the president.

The Republican lawmakers who are prosecuting the case planned to argue Saturday that lying under oath and obstruction of justice met the constitution's "high crimes and misdemeanours" standard for removal.

The lead prosecutor, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, was expected to deliver a summation.

As Chief Justice William Rehnquist, the presiding offi-

cer, peered down at the Senate from his elevated dais Friday, Republican Rep. Bill McCollum argued that the president, his friend Vernon Jordan, his secretary Betty Currie and at least two staff aides should testify because their testimony conflicts with that of Clinton.

"Time and again somebody is not telling the truth and time and again an analysis of ... all the testimony together with common sense says it's the president who is not telling the truth," McCollum said.

"But if you have serious doubts about the truthfulness of key witnesses, he said, they should appear in person."

The White House already has said Clinton would not testify.

Clinton's lawyers, who cannot interrupt the House presentation to object, sat quietly at the prosecution table during the arguments, waiting for their turn Tuesday.

But White House special counsel Gregory Craig launched a brief salvo outside the Senate chamber, saying prosecutors wanted to "expand and extend this proceeding for one reason: They do not have a case."

Clinton is charged under two

articles of impeachment with perjury and obstruction of justice in the first presidential impeachment trial since 1868.

Two-thirds, or 67 of the 100 senators, must vote for conviction to remove the president from office, and there are no indications that any Democrats would vote against the president.

Twelve Democrats would have to join the 55 Republicans in order to remove Clinton from office if the Republicans stay united.

The opening argument phase of the trial is governed by a bipartisan agreement that postpones the question of witnesses for at least another week. But, as Democratic Sen. Edward M. Kennedy acknowledged, "there may be very well" a party-line vote on the witness question.

During Friday's proceedings, Republican Rep. Bob Barr told the Senate that Clinton had violated perjury and obstruction of justice laws.

He urged the Senate to conclude "that William Jefferson Clinton in fact and under the law, violated his oath and violated the laws of this land, and convict him on both articles of impeachment ..."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Final results show Nazarbayev won 80 per cent in Kazak election

MOSCOW (AP) — Final results from Kazakhstan's presidential election showed that President Nursultan Nazarbayev won reelection with 79.8 per cent of the vote, a news agency reported Saturday. Serikbolyn Abdildin, Kazakhstan's Communist Party chief, came in second with 11.7 per cent. ITAR-TASS reported that Kasimov, the country's Customs Committee chairman, was third with 4.6 per cent. The voting last Sunday gave Nazarbayev, who has led the Central Asian nation since it was a Soviet republic, a new, seven-year term. The election was rife with allegations of fraud, with Abdildin accusing the Central Election Commission of changing the vote's results under orders from Nazarbayev. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which specialises in vote-monitoring, also reported widespread violations. Turnout in the election was 87 per cent, the Election Commission said.

Chinese police vow to stop rising airline-related crimes

BEIJING (AP) — A rise in the number of cases of trafficking, murder, gun smuggling and theft has prompted China's police to take more vigorous efforts to combat airline-related crimes, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported Saturday. The report did not provide details on specific crimes or the measures police planned to take in order to deal with the problem. But it said that ensuring passenger safety through prevention of hijackings and terrorist attacks remained a top priority. China's airports recorded 595 criminal complaints last year, a rise of 22 per cent over the previous year, the report said. Airport police seized more than 44 kilograms of heroin and 5.8 kilograms of the stimulant known as "ice" in 57 cases, it said. Airlines reported more than 20 incidents in which passengers disobeyed regulations or joked about bombs — a criminal offence. It cited Liu Haoyang, an official in the Civil Aviation Administration's police bureau, as saying more needed to be done to publicise laws related to air travel. A lack of funds and personnel was hampering efforts to improve law enforcement, Liu said.

Rerun of vote under way in Nigeria

PORT HARCOURT, Nigeria (AFP) — Voters lined up to cast their ballots Saturday in districts across Nigeria's southeastern Rivers State in a partial rerun of elections that took place across the country last weekend. The election agency INEC had ordered a partial rerun because proper ballot papers in several districts in the large, riverine state, were not used in polling last week. The rerun is between candidates for state governor from the centre-left Peoples Democratic Party, centre-right All Peoples Party and radical Alliance for Democracy. Voting was to end at 2:30 p.m. (1330 GMT) and results are expected Sunday.

25 Tamil Tigers killed in heavy fighting in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (ADP) — Sri Lanka's defence ministry said Saturday 25 Tamil Tigers were killed in clashes and 12 troops wounded in heavy fighting in the region. The ministry said in a statement that 10 guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed and 12 soldiers wounded in a major confrontation at the northern town of Mankulam Friday. The defence ministry said the attack took place when the rebels fired mortar rounds at the troops as they strengthened positions near the town. In other incidents, troops killed 13 Tamil Tigers at the northeastern town of Oddusuddan Friday and recovered a number of weapons. Two more rebels were killed by soldiers near Vannivilankulam.

Suspect dead, officers, customer wounded in attempted robbery

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A suspected bank robber was killed and two police officers and a customer were wounded in a shootout during an attempted robbery in the heart of the city's financial district. The suspect was shot in the head Friday after the gun battle with pursuing officers, said police spokesman Sherman Ackerson. Officers Dennis O'Mahoney, who was shot in the upper left leg and ankle, and Mark Cota, who was shot in the knee, were hospitalised in fair condition. The customer was in critical condition following surgery with gunshot wounds to the eye and head. Two suspects, one armed with a gun, came into a Bank of America branch during the evening rush hour and ordered everyone onto the floor. An employee triggered an alarm. "This is your classic takeover style robbery," Ackerson said. Police were still searching Friday night for the second suspect.

'Foreign students cheated with fake offers in Malaysia'

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Crime syndicates are cheating foreign students wishing to study at Malaysian universities with fake offers, a news report said Saturday. Some students are paying tuition fees between \$3,000 to \$5,000 for non-existent study courses. Immigration Department Director-General Asef Che Mat was quoted as saying by the national news agency Bernama. There have been some reports of foreigners being lured into the country with false acceptance letters and forced into prostitution, Asef said. The Immigration Department has cracked down on the scam by introducing new entry procedures for foreign students. Malaysian colleges attract students from the Middle East, Africa, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and China.

Six Viagra users die in Britain

LONDON (R) — Six people in Britain taking the anti-impotence drug Viagra have died, health officials said Saturday. But the officials, giving a breakdown of the deaths reported to them by doctors, stressed that the figures did not necessarily mean that the fatalities were caused by the drug. "The drug is under continuous safety monitoring," a health department spokeswoman said. "Doctors have got to be alert and very careful," she added. The Medicines Control Agency, which licenses drugs for use in Britain, has received reports from doctors of 51 adverse reactions linked to the drug produced by Pfizer Inc. "Six reports had fatal outcomes," the spokeswoman said in nature. One, I believe, was a significant haemorrhage. The other was believed to have suffered a brain haemorrhage. The treatment was licensed in September.

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Morgan Tsvangirai, chairman of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions speaks to civil rights demonstrators in the city centre. About a thousand people joined the march to press for constitutional reforms and ask for the release of The Zimbabwe Standard editor Mark Chavunduka. Chavunduka has been unlawfully arrested by military police following a story alleging a foiled attempted military coup (Reuters photo)

Hundreds march in Zimbabwe to protest editor's detention

HARARE (AFP) — Hundreds of demonstrators marched through Zimbabwe's capital Saturday protesting the detention of a newspaper editor and the country's military involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The march was organised by a pressure group calling for the reform of Zimbabwe's constitution, but the DRC conflict and the detention of Standard

editor Mark Chavunduka dominated speeches and protest songs. Chavunduka was detained by military police Tuesday after his newspaper ran a story that 23 army officers had been arrested for involvement in a coup plot against President Robert Mugabe.

His detention has sparked a constitutional crisis, with the ministry of defence defying a high court order to release the editor issued

on the grounds that the military has no right to detain civilians. Lawyers representing Chavunduka's newspaper group made an urgent application to the high court Friday for the arrest of Defence Minister Moven Mahachi should the ministry continue to refuse to release him.

The hearing has been scheduled for Monday afternoon. Zimbabwe Congress of

Trade Unions (ZCTU) leader Morgan Tsvangirai told the marchers that "if the military gets involved with civilians, it shows that it is the military itself which is now ruling Zimbabwe."

Tsvangirai led a series of national strikes last year to protest economic hardships, and has condemned the government's costly military support for President Laurent Kabila in the DRC conflict.

Indonesian military opens court martial over Aceh killings

JAKARTA (AFP) — Military authorities in Indonesia's troubled province of Aceh Saturday opened the courts martial of an officer and four privates over the torture-killing of four civilian detainees and torture of 20 others, an officer and a witness said.

The officer, who identified himself as Thoyib, said the trial of Major Bayu Najib had opened at the military police headquarters in Banda Aceh, the main city of Aceh, Indonesia's westernmost province.

Azwar, a witness from the Forum of NGOs in Aceh, said another trial, of the four privates over the same case, opened at another room in the same building.

In Najib's trial, the court was adjourned after only seven minutes as the defence lawyers failed to appear.

When it resumed, military prosecutor Colonel Elgin accused the defendant of torture that led to casualties, Azwar said.

The court also heard three

witnesses, Corporal Bejo who was on guard duty at the building where the civilian detainees were held and a police captain and an army captain from the local district police and military stations.

Bejo caused a stir in the packed room when he said some 100 troops were actually garrisoned on the floor above the area where the attacks took place.

In the trials of the four soldiers — Group Head Privates Amsir, Ukim Harahap and Efendi and Private first class Manolaur Situmorang — the prosecutor read out the same charges as against Najib.

The trials were both adjourned until Sunday.

A resident and Azwar said the court drew a large crowd, including outside the strongly guarded building where the courts martial took place.

Security was heavy at the venue of the trial, held at the military police headquarters there. Civilians attending the court proceedings had their identities

thoroughly checked. The court rooms were packed by some 200 people while more than 100 others followed the proceeding from loudspeakers outside the building, sitting on benches provided by the office.

Several students were also carrying posters and yelling slogans, demanding death for the defendant and his subordinates, the resident said.

"We are trying to rush the case and hopefully a verdict can come down on Monday," Thoyib said.

The defendants were suspected of involvement in the violent attack in Lhokseumawe, some 300 kilometres east of Banda Aceh, that left four civilians dead and 20 wounded, he added.

Najib is the executive commander of the 113 Infantry Battalion based in Bireun, some 240 kilometres east of Banda Aceh.

The five defendants, including Najib, were among 27 soldiers to be court-martialled over their

involvement in the attack. Four of the detainees died following the attack while 20 others were hospitalised for serious injuries after some 50 soldiers attacked the centre and beat them up. The detainees had been arrested during anti-rebel raids intended to capture the alleged leader of a separatist group and to find two soldiers believed to have been kidnapped by rebels.

The military operation followed the killing of seven Indonesian soldiers and the abduction of two officers late in December.

The 22 other soldiers also believed to be implicated in the attack and who will face court martial, were still under detention in Lhokseumawe.

Thoyib said the courts martial were expected to reach a verdict Monday, before the Eid-el-Fitr Muslim holiday.

A separatist movement, the Aceh Merdeka, (Free Aceh) has been fighting for an independent Islamic state in Aceh since the mid-1970s.

Taiwanese official accuses China of obstructing dialogue

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A Taiwanese negotiator Saturday accused China of obstructing improved relations by trying to impose preconditions for the planned visit to Taiwan by a top Chinese negotiator.

Friday, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, the Chinese semi-official negotiating body, invited a middle ranking Taiwanese official to China to "exchange views and arrange for political and economic dialogue."

Taiwan had hoped for a meeting between middle ranking

officials simply to prepare for the visit by Wang Daohua, the association's chairman, to reciprocate the one his Taiwanese counterpart Koo Chen-fu made to Beijing last October. "A visit to Taiwan by Mr. Wang would be significant in itself," said Shi Hwei-yow, vice chairman of Straits Exchange Foundation, which handles exchanges with China.

"Now (China) says Mr. Wang will visit Taiwan only after some arrangements are made for future political and economic dialogue. Are they

not creating obstacles to the visit? We should go by the rules and not attach conditions as one sees fit." But Shi did not say whether Taiwan would agree to send an official to Beijing as China had proposed.

A round of visits would be the first major exchange since Koo made a watershed visit to China last October. China suspended dialogue between the two organisations in 1995 in anger over a campaign by Taiwan to assert itself internationally, and Koo's visit was the highest level meeting

between the sides since then. Wang pledged at that time to visit Taiwan in 1999 while the two also agreed to strengthen dialogue in the future. Taiwan wants talks to pick up where they left off on practical subjects such as fishing rights and repatriation of illegal aliens. But China insists that discussions include topics related to reunition between the sides.

China and Taiwan split amid civil war in 1949, and China continues to claim the island as a breakaway province.

U.S., North Korea start talks on suspected nuclear site

GENEVA (AFP) — The United States and North Korea began talks here Saturday over Washington's demand to inspect an underground site suspected of being used to revive Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

Amid tight security, North Korean officials entered the U.S. mission in Geneva shortly after 10:00 a.m. (0900 GMT).

The talks are aimed at saving a 1994 agreement under which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme in return for aid and the easing of Korean-war era sanctions against the hardline communist state.

The North Korean delegation is headed by vice foreign minister Kim Kye-Gwan and the U.S. team by the special envoy for Korean affairs Charles Kartman.

"The essential discussion revolves around our serious concern and suspicion regarding the underground site. In order to ascertain the North Korean claim that it is not related to nuclear activity we should be provided access," said a U.S. official, who asked

not to be identified. North Korea stepped up pressure ahead of Saturday's meeting, renewing a demand that the United States pay \$300 million to inspect the site. Washington has rejected the demand, saying it was designed to pile on pressure ahead of the talks.

Pyongyang claims the site is for civilian purposes, and accuses the United States of foot-dragging over its side of the 1994 bargain.

Under that accord, a U.S.-led consortium agreed to replace North Korea's risky graphite nuclear reactors — which produce weapons-grade plutonium — with safer light-water models.

The United States also agreed to supply 500,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil to North Korea annually to help with its energy needs until the reactors come on stream around 2003.

However, in August a U.S. spy satellite spotted activity at an underground complex in a hillside near Yongbyon, where North Korea's mothballed nuclear reactors are located.

U.S. officials suspect the site could be used to produce plutonium for nuclear arms. The U.S. Congress has threatened to block further funding for the deal amid concerns over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile capabilities.

Concern over North Korea's missile programme flared in August when Pyongyang launched a rocket over Japanese territory, supposedly to put a satellite into orbit. Tokyo insists it was a ballistic missile test.

Japan, one of the partners in the Korean peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) which is bankrolling the 1994 deal, has also threatened to withdraw funding following the rocket launch.

Collapse of the 1994 agreement would confront Washington and its allies in the region with tough choices about how to deal with a heavily-armed North Korea that may already have built nuclear devices.

The United States, which has 37,000 troops in South Korea, and other north-east Asian

nations want to reduce tension on the divided peninsula, the world's last cold war frontier. The 1950-53 Korean war ended with a truce, but a permanent peace treaty was never signed, leaving North and South Korea technically still in war half a century later.

The United States and North Korea have held several rounds of talks, the last in New York and Washington in December.

North Korea, which has suffered years of famine and a shrinking economy, routinely uses the threat of its nuclear and missile capabilities to extract compromises and cash from the United States and its allies.

The talks here follow U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen's tour of Japan and South Korea, where he discussed the threat posed by North Korea.

"North Korea will lose any hope of realising the benefits of dialogue and engagement if it undermines the (1994) Framework Agreement," Cohen said.

The bilateral talks continue here Sunday.

Congo rebels propose direct talks with Kabila in Kisangani

GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo (AFP) — Rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) fighting to overthrow President Laurent Kabila have proposed to hold direct negotiations with him in the northeastern town of Kisangani under their control.

"Kabila's call inviting the Congolese Rally for Democracy (CRD) to a meeting in Kinshasa indicates that the principle of direct negotiations is a fact," the CRD said in a statement.

"Meanwhile, the location of the meeting must yet be agreed upon," it said, adding: "Instead of Kinshasa, as proposed by Kabila, the CRD suggests that the meeting take place in Kisangani."

The Tutsi-led rebels have been fighting to overthrow Kabila since August.

Questioned Friday by AFP, the military commander of the rebels, Jean-Pierre Ondekane, said: "I am ready to go to Kinshasa if Kabila accepts that five of my battalions of 1,000 men each with one tank per battalion and several armoured vehicles ensure my security on site."

Kisangani, the DRC's third city and the rebels' military headquarters, is located some 1,600 kilometres northeast of Kinshasa. Last weekend, the city was the target of aerial bombardments which killed 17 civilians.

The rebels also demanded to "participate directly in all negotiations on the Congolese crisis and to plan meetings at these negotiations between the two sides without intermediaries, on the sidelines of the global talks."

Meanwhile, in Lusaka, a meet-

ing of ministers from 15 southern African countries ended early Saturday without an agreement on holding a new heads of state summit on the DRC conflict.

The summit, which the rebels did not attend, had been billed as follow-up to a ceasefire accord but diplomats said Friday evening that such a document was unlikely to emerge in Lusaka because of Kinshasa's refusal to consider proposals put by the rebels.

Questioned by AFP, the DRC Justice Minister Mwenze Kongolo said that for his government, talks should primarily focus on a ceasefire "between us and the invaders", meaning Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

An official communiqué issued early Saturday said the ministers had agreed to set up two committees "to submit

reports to the next regional ministerial meeting which should be convened as soon as possible". The "committee on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement", will be headed by Zambia and will include countries involved in the fighting in the former Zaire.

The other, the "committee on security concerns in the Congo and neighbouring states" will include Zambia, Kenya, Botswana and Mauritius.

All eyes are now expected to turn to Windhoek.

Namibian President Sam Nujoma Friday announced a meeting Sunday of the heads of state directly militarily involved in the conflict: Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Kinshasa on one side, and Rwanda, Uganda and the rebels on the others.

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Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman

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Facsimile: Editorial: 5696183, Advertising: 5693337

E-mail: jtimes@go.com.jo

Web Site: <http://www.access2arabia.com/jordantimes/>

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times Advertising Department.

Sanctions cripple people

IF HISTORY were considered, as the great orator Cicero said, master of life, no one would doubt that democracy is the main key to economic development and peace, and no one would hesitate to encourage the establishment of real democracy as a first step towards healing the plights of any people.

The current world situation clearly shows that none of the so-called "developed countries" is based on anything less than a democratic system. Modern history teaches us that, from Japan, through Europe, to America, economies have only just taken off from the tarmac of political democratic reforms.

The international community, and especially the leading powers, cannot continue ignoring their own history when it comes to Iraq and the suffering of the already decimated Iraqi population.

Economic development is a condition sine qua non for peace, and democracy is in turn a condition sine qua non for economic development.

This was the enlightened principle behind the proposal that France, the country where the idea of modern democracy was first developed, presented to the U.N. Security Council last week.

Only when the eight-year-old crippling embargo on Iraq is lifted will the Iraqi nation be able to stand on its feet and fight for democracy.

Paris' initiative seems to have had a spillover effect, if even Washington appears convinced to gradually abandon its previous stands, based on the erroneous presumption that lifting the embargo would strengthen the regime in Baghdad.

History is full of examples of leaders who have exploited sanctions and economic hardships to strengthen their regimes, facilitated in their ambitious designs by the fact that, no matter how oppressed, people would naturally rally around a leader when facing outside threats.

In our century, two world wars were triggered by identical situations. And in Iraq eight years of sanctions have only succeeded in killing innocent women and children, and ensuring the continuation of the political status quo.

Washington must now fully assess the failure of its past stands and change the course, if, as it says, its goal is the removal of the threats Baghdad poses to the region and the achievement of stability in the Middle East.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Ahmad Musleh said if news reports on a scheduled meeting in Sharm Al Sheikh this month to discuss Palestinian refugees and the displaced were accurate, it is an indication that the U.N. resolution on the issue will be revived. However, it is notable that Israel is not participating in the conference, which will include a number of Arab countries, Canada, Italy, Spain and Japan. This means that either Israel is still insisting on refusing the displaced's return, said the writer, or that it might agree to the meeting without participation for pure elections-related matters. In both cases, the displaced's return is purely the Palestinian state's concern, and it is no longer a secret that some of those people have already returned to Gaza and other Palestinian National Authority areas. Musleh contended. The issue of Palestinian refugees and the displaced will remain at the heart of the peace process in line with international legitimacy, said Musleh.

Al Dustour's Jihad Momani said the Gulf Cooperation Council's recent decision to call for the lifting of the sanctions on the Iraqi people, was the strongest unified Gulf stand regarding the crisis. Such a call can be considered a reevaluation in the Gulf states' policy, which up until now had blamed Iraq's leadership for the sanctions, said Momani. The U.S. suggestion to allow Iraq to export oil in exchange for medicine and food has encouraged the council to make such a move, added the writer. According to Momani, the council's decision is in lieu of international legitimacy, which is constantly being broken by the U.S., Britain and of course Israel. Ahead of the Arab foreign ministers' meeting, the council has opened the way for a unified, alternative and developed Gulf stand towards implementing international legitimacy, Momani claimed.

Should we join the WTO?

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Fanek

penetrating export markets. Proponents of membership can hardly point to a present actual obstacle that will be removed upon joining the WTO.

Tamam Al Ghoul, a government officer in charge of the WTO file, published an article in Al-Ra'i newspaper (January 7, 1999) list-

ing the benefits which will accrue in favour of Jordan after accession to WTO. Regrettably, his arguments could not convince an open-minded observer who is not, as a matter of principle, against joining the WTO like myself. Is it true, as Ghoul claims, that Jordan's membership will improve the world's image of the Jordanian economy, attract foreign investments, increase exports, strengthen Jordan's trade position, facilitate transiting our products through other countries, enhance inter-Arab trade, raise the revenues of the treasury etc.? One would have to respond to each of these alleged benefits by the simple question "how?"

Each one of the above claims is a desirable outcome, which is worth substantiation. The truth of the matter is that WTO membership may be the last reason why the above advantages have not yet materialised.

BECOMING MEMBERS of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is a decision made and policy followed by the last three Jordanian governments. The delay of accession is due to certain formalities and obstacles set forth by the organisation, which is still questioning and evaluating answers, until some 120 members of the WTO are convinced that the Jordanian economic system is eligible and qualified for membership.

The issue of joining the WTO, important as it may be, was not sufficiently and thoroughly discussed in Jordan's business circles. Since membership of the WTO and abiding by its regulations will lead to a major change in the way we deal and exchange goods and services with the world, and since there must be both winners and losers from taking such a crucial step, it is necessary for both parties to present their arguments, pro and con, so that public opinion understands the consequences and can compare benefits and costs to take an informed position on the issue.

A meaningful dialogue has not yet taken place. The objections against the WTO which we have heard or read so far have been mostly of an ideological nature. Some people reject the very idea of opening up to the world, and see in globalisation a plot by Western capitalism against Third World countries. Yet such objections have not come up with convincing arguments, because they try in vain to oppose natural historical trends.

We understand that domestic industries may be exposed to fiercer foreign competition which will reduce their profit margins or even turn them into losses, because customs protection will have to be minimised, and non-tariff restrictions will be removed.

Likewise we understand that adhering to intellectual property rights will hurt industries like the pharmaceutical factories, both public and private media outlets, universities, and publishers. However, we notice that leaders and managers of those enterprises remain silent. It seems that they will not speak out until it is too late to do anything about it.

At the same time, we don't know exactly who will stand to benefit from joining the WTO, so as to urge them to defend the project and press for early accession to the global organisation. Most Jordanian export activities, except phosphate, potash, and fertilisers, are carried out by industries who depend heavily on the domestic market, and therefore may not be enthusiastic about full liberalisation of the Jordanian market. As far as we know, those enterprises are not currently facing difficulties from being outside the WTO in

M. KAHIL



There is only one way to end suffering in Iraq: Scrap the sanctions

By Michael Jansen

NICOSIA — The U.S. proposal to eliminate the ceiling on Iraqi oil exports cannot put an end to the humanitarian crisis in that country or halt the economic slide caused by eight and a half years of sanctions.

Only the scrapping of the punitive sanctions regime can do this. Recognising this fact, Jordan and several other Arab countries, France, Russia and China have all been proposing an end to sanctions for some time. But when Paris put forward a plan including the lifting of the embargo on the oil sector in the Security Council this week, Washington responded with its scheme. But this does not go far enough.

Sanctions are not only killing the Iraqi people, but are, also, destroying the source of the country's revenues: its oil fields. Although the fields have been deteriorating ever since sanctions were imposed in August 1990, it was only last week that the full extent of the disaster was revealed by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan in a report to the Security Council.

The report, published in the Nicosia-based Middle East Economic Survey (MEES), was based on evidence gathered in Iraq last December by four experts from the Dutch firm of Saylor. They said that Iraq's oil industry is "in a lamentable state" and oil production capacity is declining at an annual "rate of 4-8 per cent."

The Dutch experts estimate that 20 per cent of Iraq's wells have already been "irreparably damaged... due to the lack of water-removal facilities." The others, the team said, could be returned to production if replacement parts are "made available on a timely basis."

"Unless Iraq is expeditiously provided with essential oil spare parts and equipment, it may be difficult to sustain even the current level of production and export of oil," the Dutch team reported.

ment procedures in order to produce just over half the amount oil" to meet its target.

At present Iraq is pumping 2.4-2.5 million barrels a day of which 1.88 million barrels are exported. This earns only \$3.04 billion in revenues instead of the \$5.2 billion permitted during each six month period of the oil-for-food programme.

This level of production does "not generate enough revenue to rehabilitate the fields as well as meet the needs of the people," Khadduri stated. Iraq's "high production policy has already damaged a number of fields... and the situation could

'Iraq's oil industry is 'in a lamentable state' and oil production capacity is declining at an annual 'rate of 4-8 per cent'

become worse" unless Iraq's fields are repaired.

This is not likely to happen as long as the U.N. Security Council committee monitoring Iraq's purchases of replacement parts and equipment for the oil sector continues. During his presentation to the council, the secretary general was highly critical of the "slow" processing of applications by this committee which has led to long delays in deliveries of the necessary equipment. The U.S. and Britain have dominated this committee ever since it was established in 1991, prohibiting and delaying purchases of humanitarian and educational supplies as well as material for the oil sector. An initial \$300 million ship-

ment of replacement parts for the oil production sector was delivered only last week. And the U.S. has said it will continue to ban parts and equipment for Iraq's refineries without which, Khadduri asserted, the country's humanitarian and economic crises cannot be overcome.

Desperate to raise income from oil sales Baghdad is trying to increase exports to 3 million barrels a day. Thus, over the past three weeks Iraq has raised exports to 2 million barrels a day, risking more damage to its already seriously damaged fields. This policy, born of desperation and frustration, will contribute to the destruction of the long-term economic prospects of Iraq which are very poor as long as sanctions remain in place.

Iraq's oil industry requires more than replacement parts and the repair of equipment now in operation. It needs thoroughgoing renovation and an updating of techniques and technologies. In technological terms, Iraq's oil fields remain frozen in the '70s and '80s, because Baghdad was unable to keep pace with developments during the war with Iran, 1980-88. So when sanctions were imposed in 1990, the country's oil fields were already suffering from obsolescence. As long as sanctions remain and Iraq's revenues must flow through the escrow account monitored by the council committee, its oil sector will not be free to redevelop faltering fields.

Furthermore, Washington has resolutely blocked plans to bring new proven fields into production. For instance, France, Russia and China have been prevented from doing preliminary work on the Qurna and Ahdab fields.

Unless Baghdad is allowed to both modernise its existing fields and bring new fields into production, Iraq's oil sector will continue to shrink. Thus, the total lifting of the embargo on the oil sector — in line with the French plan — and the ending of the entire sanctions regime are the only solutions to Iraq's short-term woes and long-term needs.

LETTERS

Sweeping dirt under the carpet fools no one

To the Editor:

I FULLY SUPPORT Rana Hussein in her efforts to expose an ugly and unreasonable practice rooted in our society for centuries. I would like to applaud her efforts, and to respond to those who naively claim that what she is doing actually tarnishes Jordan's image abroad, by reminding them that image only goes so far in projecting a "modern" and "good" perception. After a brief encounter with a pretty facade, ugly realities rear their heads, and nobody is served by sweeping problems under the carpet. As a Jordanian who is living abroad, I believe that Rana Hussein's effort in fact improves Jordan's image as a mature nation that is capable of looking inward, examining itself and tackling its societal problems and shortcomings head on.

I wish to bring attention to the fact that our society, warm and wonderful, as it is, can in fact be exceedingly harsh and intolerant when some innocent and well-intending women make mistakes, fall for deceptive promises, or in some cases for that matter, make personal decisions that are nobody's business. It is perhaps time to focus on the law's impotent and lenient approach in dealing with such crimes, but I do believe we as a society are guilty of perpetrating these horrendous crimes by exposing families of victims to great pressure in the name of honour.

Mustafa Kraishan
U.S.

Stop the madness!

To the Editor:

I AM a Canadian born, Muslim wife and mother of three, with a Palestinian/Jordanian background. I had the great pleasure to see the CNN segment on honour killings. I am so glad Rana Hussein's hard work has focused international attention on this serious crime against women. Hopefully something will be done to stop this insanity.

Sana Hantash
Toronto
Canada

Benefits of decentralisation

To the editor:

ACCORDING to a May, 1998 article in the Harvard Business Review, entitled "Evolution and revolution as organisation grow," businesses in their lifetimes undergo several periods of change. "The critical task for management in each revolutionary period is to find a set of organisational practices that will become the basis for managing the next period of evolutionary growth. A company in a rapidly expanding market will have to add employees quickly; hence, the need for new organisational structures to accommodate large staff increases is accelerated." Analogously, our government, in a rapidly growing society, has done the same by eliminating the Civil Service Commission.

We are now in a delegation phase. It allows government, to expand by means of the heightened motivation of individual governors at lower levels. Individual governors in decentralised positions, who have a greater authority and incentives, are able to penetrate career segments of society, respond faster to citizens' and develop new laws!

Yasser Atiyeh
Amman

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

Save Water

Every drop counts

King Hussein: We have overcome all obstacles, difficulties and challenges

Following is an official translation of His Majesty King Hussein's address to the nation on Saturday, January 16, 1999. The text was provided by the International Press Office of the Royal Court.

In The Name Of God, The Compassionate, The Merciful and May God's Prayers And Blessings Be Upon His Arab, Hashemite, Faithful Prophet, And Upon The Prophet's Household And Disciples.

Dear brother Jordanians,

May God's peace and blessings be upon you, and furthermore,

The happiest and most blessed moments are those that unite me with you to convey to you my best greetings, and to greet you as a brother who years for his brothers and his clan after his long absence, and after his longing for his country has reached a peak. You are the best of families, and the best of tribes, the noble men and women of our beloved Jordan. You are the best companions on our journey, the honest and faithful men, who are not swayed by events, and whose determination is not diminished by difficulties or challenges. You are the men who have never known any loyalty save to the soil of Jordan, nor any allegiance save to its message and banner. I have known you over the long years, in course of which we have built Jordan together, with our faith, determination, and endeavour. By the grace of God, we have overcome all obstacles, difficulties, and challenges. We have been at the forefront of our nation, defending its causes and its future.

For this, we had to endure more than mountains could bear. I attest that you have always been the most faithful to your pledge, the purest in your conscience, the noblest in your intentions, the most constant in your determination, the greatest in your sacrifices, and the most enduring in the face of hardships, perils, and challenges. May God reward you bountifully and grant you faith to consolidate your faith.

And furthermore, my beloved brothers, we thank God as befits His Majesty, omnipotence, and boundless mercy. We thank Him in adversity, through our acceptance of His judgement, and our faith in his magnanimity, and we thank Him in prosperity for having granted me recovery, as well as His countless other blessings.

My brothers, my family, my clan,

I was keen, since I left our homeland to start my treatment, to maintain contact with you, and to inform you in honesty of the most minute details of my health condition, and the progress of the treatment. This has always been my attitude towards you. The pioneer does not lie to his people, nor does he conceal from them that which he believes they need to know: for life and death are in the hand of God, and when the time comes, none shall delay it nor advance it even by an hour. Our prayers and our hope is to gain the acceptance of the Almighty, and to be among those who meet Him in His mercy.

In spite of the length of the treatment, and its difficulty, and the effects of this type of treatment, such as physical and emotional pains and exhaustion, I have been careful to maintain two aspects of the sense of

duty: The first was the faith in God's justice with which every Hashemite, descending from the House of the Prophet, and honoured by Islam, faces hardships with courage, endurance and tranquillity, springing from his faith in God's mercy and acceptance of God's judgement. I thank the Almighty God for filling my heart with tranquillity and contentment, and for giving me the courage, determination, endurance and tranquillity. My heart was never faint, my conscience did not know impatience nor solitude, nor did my determination and hope waver. Instead, my spirit was fortified by readings from the Koran, which I did at night and during the day, and which suffused my heart with contentment and lit my conscience with hope.

The second was my concern to keep abreast with your news, and to remain apprised continuously of the affairs of the nation in all their details, through the information provided for me by my dear brother and Regent, His Royal Highness Prince Hassan, who spared no effort, and who gave generously, for which he has our thanks and appreciation, and through my meetings with high officials. This was in fulfillment of my pledge to you since the first moment when God honoured me with the prime responsibility in our beloved Jordan. I committed myself willingly to devote every moment of my life to serving you and to realising the hopes and ambitions for which we have all devoted our lives, to complete the march started by our fathers and grandfathers, when they marched behind Al Hussein Ben Ali, and took their place under the banner of the (Great Arab) Revolt, and later, when they sought the leadership of the

founding grandfather, the martyr Abdullah Ben Al Hussein. These are the noble hopes and ambitions for which they have offered legions of martyrs and made great sacrifices.

I recall the 14/11/1952, when I addressed to you a message from here in London. I said to you: "Trust that I shall always be with you in my spirit and my mind, that my heart yearns to meet with you, that I constantly think of your good, that I am eager to serve you, that I shall strive to achieve your prosperity, and that I pledge to you before God to stay always in touch with you, to listen to your wishes, and to work to realise them as much as I can." I have fulfilled this pledge. Neither the distance, nor the illness have stood between us. You and our beloved Jordan have been in my heart and in my conscience. I feel your pulse and the warmth of your sincere feelings, and I share with you every moment of happiness or anxiety.

Your sincere prayers that sprang from hearts full of faith and love, asking the Almighty God to bless me with recovery and health, and your constant inquiries after my condition, your eagerness for my return to you, and all the noble and pure sentiments that you expressed, in all spontaneity, truth, and faithfulness, have reached me. They encouraged me and they gave me strength, determination, hope, assurance, peace, and confidence regarding the future. Your noble and loyal sentiments will fill me with appreciation, thankfulness, and pride for as long as I live.

Now that I have recovered fully, by the grace of God, it will be merely the batting of an eye before I am again in your midst, so that we can resume the work to build our nation, with the initiative, resolve, determination, and

strength that you have always known in your brother Al Hussein. Thank God, my determination is the same, the resolve that has never wavered is still as you have always known it. We should, soon, make a comprehensive review of our nation's progress and address all issues and challenges that occupy our minds or handicap our blessed progress.

I have learnt, brothers, that you are preparing to celebrate my return to the homeland, and that you will come out to welcome me, as you did years ago when I returned from my first trip for treatment, to embody the strongest, deepest and noblest bond between a leader and his people, as you flock from all the towns and villages of Jordan, from its countryside and desert, to Amman, our proud capital city that is Arab in its face, voice, and conscience, as it receives your brother Al Hussein, and as its mountains, and hills echo your cheers, songs, and noble nationalist chants.

I wish to request of you, my dear brothers and family, that we should avoid firing gunshots as an expression of our happiness, so as to avoid robbing anyone among us, or any Jordanian family of his or their pleasure with a stray bullet that may hit someone. I know that you miss me, and that you have waited a long time for this reunion. God knows how much I miss you, and how happy I am to be with you again. But let us express our joy in a civilised way free from any action that may cause even the slightest harm, or mar the happiness of any member of our great Jordanian family. That would be unacceptable, and incompatible with our values and breeding. I am full of hope that this request will meet your acceptance and approval.

Furthermore, dear brothers,

I would like to address my thanks and appreciation to each and every one among you, the sons of the great and united family of Al Hussein, of all backgrounds and origins, in your cities, countryside, and desert, for your feelings of love and loyalty that are without equal in the world. I salute you and I shake your hand one by one, the soldier at his outpost, the worker in his factory, the farmer in his field, the civil servant in his department, the student in his school or university, and the elderly, the mothers, and children in their homes. I say to all of you, may God reward you bountifully for me and for the nation.

As for the brothers and friends, the leaders, presidents, and princes of friendly and brotherly countries, and the officials and citizens from all parts of the world who have hurried to comfort themselves regarding my condition, and to inquire after my health, or who expressed wishes and prayers for my recovery, I give them all my thanks and appreciation, and I ask God to reward them for me.

My dear brothers,

I salute you, and I thank you once again, and I congratulate you on the arrival of 'Eid Al Fitr, may God make it one of prosperity for us all, and for all the Arab and Islamic nations. I ask the Almighty God to bless and keep you, and to guide our footsteps to the path of righteousness. Our trust is tomorrow, and tomorrow is close to those that await it. Many happy returns of the 'Eid to you all and to Jordan.

May God's peace and blessings be with you.

Repackaging and imports: Arab cinema through history

Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity
Viola Shafik
The American University in Cairo Press, 1998,
253 pages, \$19.95

FOR A variety of reasons, cinema is considered an import to the Arab World. Islam, the predominant religion, discouraged figurative visual representation. Economic and technical resources were sparse or lacking altogether, and wherever French colonialism reigned, indigenous cultural production was deliberately hindered.

Yet filmmaker Viola Shafik was not content with the notion that in its 75 years of existence, Arab cinema has developed exclusively due to foreign influence. She did extensive research aimed at pinpointing the various and sometimes contradictory inputs that make up Arab Cinema today. The resulting book, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*, presents a review of over 300 films, with commentary on the political, historical and economic circumstances in which they were produced. Shafik does not restrict herself to the parameters of previous studies on cinema, which related it to nationalism. She focused on cultural identity and explored the relation between film and other art forms — music, visual arts, literature and theatre. She devoted particular attention to traditional popular theatre — *Khamisa*, shadow plays (*sandhuq al-dunya* and *khayal al-zil*), and improvised comic sketches (*fasl mudhik*). In the process, she discovered linkages that led to her thesis of "repackaging."

Although Arab cinema is based on Western technique, what the audience views is not a pure import, but the result of a dynamic interaction between Western and native influences, high and popular culture, and various regional subcultures. This is "repackaging": "Imagery, technique and the 'language' of the (Western) media have been

adopted, but transformed according to the regionally prevalent cultural and social system" (pp. 7-8).

Originally, popular culture inspired the tools for Arabising cinema. "The twentieth century saw not only the spread of three-dimensional realistic plastic art and central perspective, but also a confrontation with a new idea of art, based on the dichotomy between fine arts on one hand and crafts on the other" (p. 50). Arab fine arts were linked to the elite and thus came in conflict with native cinema which was closer to popular art. The genres prevalent in commercial Arab cinema as it began in Egypt — the farce, musical and melodrama — are not mere copies of their Western counterparts, but derive partly from traditional popular theatre.

In their attempt to portray "real life" on the screen, Arab filmmakers "from the very beginning preferred to use colloquial dialects (al-amiya) for dialogue," instead of classical Arabic which permeated high culture (p. 81). In general, Arab film has relied heavily on verbal narrative rather than visual arrangements. This was not only due to Islam's shunning of images or cinema's close connection to theatre, but stemmed from filmmakers' desire to reach illiterate audiences who were accustomed to traditional oral narrative forms such as poetry and storytelling. Not until the 70s did Arab filmmakers concern themselves with the refined visual aesthetics that preoccupied Europeans.

As the first Arab country to create a national cinema industry, the only place where indigenous filmmaking began during the colonial period, and still the undisputed big producer, Egypt occupies a central place in this book. By the 50s, feature films were being produced at a rate comparable to today, serving as a model for Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi cinema. In this development, native literary influences were important. "Realist literature played a decisive role in establishing realist cinema in

Egypt." The first long Egyptian feature film, *Zaynab* (1930), was adapted from a novel by Muhammad Hossain Halkal. "The realist wave of the 1950s owes a great deal to the influence of the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who left deep traces particularly in the work of Salah Abu Seif," who introduced post-colonial Egyptian realism in cinema (pp. 132-133).

In contrast, France monopolised filming and theatres in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. No feature films were shot by native directors until independence. Then Algeria became the artistic and economic counterpart of Egyptian commercial cinema, with its socialist-oriented, state-sponsored, "Third Worldist" films. Until 1972, almost all films dealt with the liberation war (though, ironically, some of these emulated the style of American Westerns).

The 1967 war was a turning point for Arab cinema. In terms of serious films, it paved the way for a new kind of commitment; nationalism and realism gave way to "New Arab Cinema." This is not a monolithic genre, but ranges from the depiction of social problems to avant-garde art films. What "New Cinema" filmmakers share is disillusionment with existing political systems. They avoid unified narratives purported to be the truth, instead showing reality as more diverse and diffuse. Politics may be addressed in terms of how it affects people's daily life; previously ignored social groups are often given a voice.

Stylistic experimentation increased. "The first serious efforts in Arab cinema to pay particular attention to visual representation came at the end of the 1960s." For example, Chadi Abdessalam's 1969 film, *"The Mummy"*,



used principles of representation from ancient, pre-Islamic, Egyptian art to deal with modern Egyptians' relation to their ancient culture (p. 50). Similar use of Islamic heritage has so far been attempted only by Tunisian Nacer Khemir in *"Wanderers in the Desert"* (1984) and *"The Lost Necklace of the Dove"* (1990), by reviving the legacy of Andalusia. Khemir experiments with the correlation between image and language, searching for images that might change meaning. "Saying the words 'palace' and 'garden' today, most Arabic speakers will hardly imagine the architecture of an Arab palace or the arrangement of an Andalusian garden, but will rather imagine European parks and castles. Khemir's films aim to provide the audience with those lost visual images..." (p. 55).

However, with a few notable exceptions, the "New Cinema" films have failed to capture the hearts and minds of the average Arab audience which continues to prefer Egyptian commercial cinema. A similar fate has met Arab cinema d'auteur (literally, the cinema of the author — artistic films centering on the director's personal vision). Recently, cinema d'auteur attempted to revive indigenous artistic forms from Arab cultural heritage in an innovative way, as part of a new search for cultural identity. "However, it has not always been successful in erasing binary antagonisms such as past and present, tradition and modernity, East and West," and has sometimes been led astray by "empty aestheticism." Many of these films have been well received in the West, but their "success at Arab box offices has remained limited" (p. 210).

By Sally Bland

Where life began

Max Rodenbeck
"Cairo"
Picador, 395 pages; £20

AFICIONADOS ARE hard put to account for the delight that envelops them as they step from their plane into the hot scented air of Cairo airport. They are about to be hit, hard and immediately, with muddle, dirt, clogged streets and near-intolerable frustration. Max Rodenbeck does the explaining for them as he unwinds Cairo's serpentine tale with wit, clear-eyed affection. He has a lightness of touch and erudition, a skill with anecdote, that recreates Egypt — for all Egypt's roads lead to Cairo — in all its contradictory richness.

Life itself began in Cairo, or so the ancient Egyptians claimed. The sweeping timescale of its story, from ancient glory to medieval decline, from Ottoman

empire to British occupation, from socialist revolution to modern money-grabbers, is held together by a loose, connecting thread: the contrast and conflict between cosmopolitan, multi-faceted Cairo and its traditional, native heart. Cairenes survive, writes Mr. Rodenbeck, who has lived in the city, on and off, for 20 years, by virtue of their "enduring, life-giving nonchalance."

They live in a city that trembles on the verge of chaos: leaking sewers can make the ancient bazaar seem a "shallower Venice." It may all be a little bit more orderly today, or as Mr. Rodenbeck, who could not write a dull sentence about "infrastructure" if he tried, puts it: "traffic and sewage soon flowed more efficiently along new conduits and bypasses, as did gossip down the rewired

telephone circuits." The uglification of the city — most Cairenes live in crumbling concrete matchboxes and most of the new luxury buildings are dire — has been constant. But the past is never far away: the faces in museums repeated in the streets.

Details illuminate Mr. Rodenbeck's cleverly written story: facts are slipped in unobtrusively. At Farouk's first wedding in 1938, when the young king who was shortly to become a byword for rottenness still seemed a latter-day Tutankhamun, even Cairo's pickpockets declared a moratorium for the day. In the early 1950s, when an anti-British mob burst into Shepherd's Hotel to burn it to the ground, the service buttons in the vast Persian-carpeted bedrooms were still marked "Native."

In the 1970s, when Cairo

rediscovered fun after the rigours of Nasserism, revolutionary hymns gave way to jingles for hairpray. Floozies catering to rich Arab visitors lunched out of shops called Pop and into clubs called Salt and Pepper. Meanwhile, as Mr. Rodenbeck, who likes the fun but never forgets its mirror-image, notes soberly, "huddles of peasants squatted numbly outside agencies touting cut-price fares to jobs in Libya, Iraq and the... Gulf."

Egypt's landless peasants, flooding into the city, came like missionaries with an ancient fervency. Mr. Rodenbeck examines the surges of religiosity that have overtaken Cairo since medieval days, times when "the hereafter came to outweigh the here and now." He analyses the dangerous period, not quite over, when intellectuals "bold enough to assert the primacy of reason over revelation knew they were doing so at their own peril."

But reason, Mr. Roden-

beck seems to suggest, is bound to prevail among Egyptians. Perhaps. A safer bet is that jokes will win through, whatever the level of religious fervour. For in Cairo, as he writes, jokes are a form of currency: a wisecrack from even the most important beggar will win instant reward. No trait in a person is so despised in Egypt as "heavy blood," a lack of humour.

Could even this be changing? Surely not. But Cairo, as Mr. Rodenbeck says, is now a tight-packed place of 12 million people, the most densely populated large urban area in the world, a tough and impatient city. Mustafa Darwiche, a film critic who was fired twice as state censor for being too permissive, agrees that the average Cairene is better off materially today than in the past. But, he adds, "We can't afford to be so care-free any more."

By Barbara Smith
The Economist

Syrian soaps Ramadan hits

By Roueida Mabardi
Agence France Presse

SYRIAN TELEVISION soap operas for Arab viewers during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, have made a big splash, breaking the long-standing stranglehold of Egyptian series.

No fewer than 15 Syrian soap operas have been shown daily on about 10 Arab satellite television channels, including Middle East Broadcasting (MBC), ART (Arabic Radio and Television) and Orbit.

Syrians are glued to their television sets, with some watching as many as eight soaps a day.

Syrian director Maamun Bunnai said a number of private production companies had sprung up in Syria over the past decade, enabling his country to compete with Egypt, which has dominated the market for decades.

"We neglected studios for the export market before," Bunnai said.

The Syrian television series focus on simple, realistic topics while those made in other Arab countries, he said, are still videotaped in the studio "and use the same themes, the same language."

Hatem Ali, director of a successful comic series called "Mirrors" said Syria had a wealth of talented actors and had transformed its lack of studios into an asset.

Arab countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the emirate of Dubai "have no hesitation about running more Syrian programmes," he said.

For the third year in a row, MBC has bought exclu-

sive rights to "Mirrors."

The 45-minute shows, broadcast nightly, depict individual and social failings by focusing on fictional politicians.

The 30-odd shows, made in Syria by independent directors, each cost an average of 15 million Syrian pounds (\$300,000).

Syria also produces historical series on the Ottoman days and those of the French mandate as well as historical fantasies such as "Death Comes to the Orient," shown by the Lebanese satellite channel Al Moustaqbal.

The series, directed by Najat Anzur, tells the history of an ideal city beleaguered by four brigands.

Syrian state television, created in 1960, has not remained on the sidelines, producing three series a year.

Part three of Hani Rantani's "Hammam Kishant" was broadcast on state television this Ramadan, a programme about Syrian history from 1950 to 1955, a period known for its political instability and coups.

Mayya, 40, said she follows no fewer than "eight soaps per day," of which five are Syrian and three Egyptian.

"I change from one channel to another and sometimes spend five hours at a stretch watching television."

Rafika, a young Tunisian, also loves Syrian soap operas.

"The Syrian directors are excellent. They approach their different topics realistically, and the sets are not artificial" in appearance as in other series, she said.

Number of job-seekers on rise in Israel

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — The number of job-seekers in Israel rose a sharp two per cent in December, the labour ministry has announced, dashing earlier hopes for an end to three years of steadily rising unemployment.

The ministry said the number of job-hunters registered with the nation's 12 unemployment centers in December rose 3,000 to 154,300.

The report was bad news for the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu four months before national elections in which Israel's economic woes have become a key issue.

In November the government announced that unemployment had fallen for the first time in three years between July and September, dropping from 9.3 per cent to 8.4 per cent of the active population.

Prior to that quarter unemployment had risen steadily since Netanyahu's right-wing government was elected to office in May 1996.

During the same period economic growth fell to a 32-year low of 1.5 per cent and foreign investment in the country plummeted.

Critics blame Netanyahu's austerity budget and high interest-rate policies for fueling the slowdown, which has become a key issue in the campaign for the May 17 general elections.

Netanyahu was forced into the early polls last month after his coalition government collapsed, in part over his economic policies.

Labour Party chairman Ehud Barak, Netanyahu's main challenger for the premiership, has focused his campaign speeches so far on the rising unemployment and economic hardship caused by the right-wing government's budget and monetary policies.

In recent days, Netanyahu has counterattacked with a rash of policy changes, including easing the government's 1999 inflation target from four per cent to 6-7 per cent, agreeing to increased education subsidies and withdrawing planned cuts in aid to the elderly.

Barak and other opposition figures quickly accused Netanyahu of waging "election economics" in a desperate bid to remain in power.

Meanwhile, Israel's long-running trade surplus with South East Asia and Japan turned into a deficit last year due to a sharp drop in diamond exports, the government said last week.

The Central Bureau of Statistics said Israel ran up a trade deficit with South East Asia and Japan of about \$170 million in 1998, compared with a \$1.02 billion surplus the year before.

The trade deficit came as Israel's total merchandise exports to the region fell 23 per cent to \$2.64 billion

while merchandise imports rose nine per cent to \$2.73 billion.

Non-diamond exports to East Asia also fell but by a more moderate 17 per cent to \$1.47 billion while non-diamond imports from the region rose 4.3 per cent to \$2.48 billion, causing Israel's non-diamond trade deficit with East Asia to swell by 66 per cent to \$1.01 billion.

Israel's trade surplus with the United States widened by 62 per cent last year to \$2.87 billion as merchandise exports grew 14.5 per cent to \$8.26 billion and merchandise imports shrank by about one per cent to \$5.39 billion.

Israel's trade deficit with the European Union (EU) narrowed by 23 per cent to \$6.15 billion. Israeli merchandise exports to the EU grew by 6.1 per cent to \$7.19 billion while merchandise imports fell by 10 per cent to \$13.34 billion.

The Central Bureau of Statistics, citing preliminary figures, earlier said that Israel's economy grew 1.9 per cent in 1998, down from 2.4 per cent in 1997 but slightly higher than previous estimates.

Chief statistician Ezra Hadar told reporters that the upward revision from an earlier estimate of 1.6 per cent was due to technical factors. But he added that recent economic indicators may point to some improvement in economic activity.

"In the last few months we have witnessed some of the earlier trends, such as increased unemployment,

slower export growth and slower industrial production, are no longer continuing," Hadar said.

"The Israeli economy is erratic and influenced by one-off events, so it is too early to say whether this represents a change in the trend," he added.

Hadar declined to comment on next year's growth outlook, noting that elections set for next May would influence the economy in ways that were difficult to predict.

The treasury is forecasting that gross domestic product (GDP) will grow 2.6 per cent in 1999, but most private sector economists expect a lower figure.

The bureau's preliminary 1998 figures put Israeli GDP growth at its lowest rate since 1989.

Israel's economy expanded rapidly in the early 1990s, energised by a wave of immigration and the opening of new export markets with the end of the Cold War. But growth began slowing in 1996 as the government imposed a tighter fiscal and monetary policy and the immigration bonus petered out.

The statistics bureau said GDP per capita fell a preliminary 0.4 per cent in 1998, marking the second year of decline. Based on purchasing power parity, per capita income was \$17,178.

The bureau said the main reasons for the slowdown in growth this year were declining investment and slower export growth.

Fixed capital formation fell 4.1 per cent led by 7.2

per cent decline in residential building, following a 3.0 per cent drop in 1997.

The growth in exports of goods and services slowed to a preliminary 5.2 per cent from 7.0 per cent in 1997.

The bureau said Israel's current account deficit would narrow by 29.5 per cent to \$3.635 billion this year, or 3.7 per cent of GDP, from \$5.285 billion in 1997, or 5.4 per cent of GDP. The deficit peaked in 1996 at \$6.954 billion.

The narrowing was mainly due to a declining trade deficit in goods and services, which the bureau said was expected to narrow by 20 per cent to \$9.033 billion (not counting defence imports).

The trade deficit was also cut by improved terms of trade, the bureau said.

Net current transfers, on the other hand, were forecasted to fall 10 per cent to \$5.298 billion. Net capital transfers fell by 20 per cent to \$2.144 billion.

Unemployment was expected to average 8.7 per cent for the full year, up from 7.7 per cent in 1997 and 6.7 per cent in 1996.

Labour productivity grew 0.5 per cent, reversing an 0.6 per cent decline in 1997.

The bureau said it had organised its statistics for the first time this year according to the "Systems of National Accounts 1993" criteria set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other major international organisations.

Euro may become part of oil pricing

DUBAI (R) — United Arab Emirates Oil Minister Obaid Ben Saif Al Nasser said oil may eventually be priced in a basket of currencies that would include Europe's fledgling euro.

"There is a possibility that in the future oil and some of the main commodities will be priced against a basket of currencies in which the dollar is the main currency along with the euro and the yen.

provided that the euro is stable and successful," he told the London-based Arabic Al Hayat newspaper.

"It is known that oil trade is currently handled primarily in the dollar and the launching of the euro has created real competition for the dollar," he added.

Nasser said the launching of the euro in most European Union countries would encourage Arab Gulf oil producers to boost their

trade with those states in the future, especially when the euro is strong and stable compared with other currencies.

He said a unified, strong European currency would facilitate easier trade with Arab Gulf states.

Nasser estimated that oil trade between Arab Gulf states and Western European countries currently stood at two million barrels per day.

Exchange Rates

Saturday, 16-01-99

CURRENCY	JORDAN DNR	SAUDI RIAL	U.S. DOLLAR	EURO	YEN	PAKISTANI RUPEE	INDIAN RUPEE	TAIWANESE DOLLAR	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	CHINESE YUAN	INDONESIAN RUPIAH	MYANMAR KYAT	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAMESE DONG	LAOS KIP	BRUNEI DOLLAR	MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	HONG KONG 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Euro may bring European car prices down, a bit

PARIS (AFP) — The common European currency should bring car prices down in at least some of the countries of the euro zone, but experts say the drop will be moderate.

Prices for similar models vary widely across the 11 states involved, because of such factors as manufacturers' policy and tax levels.

Motorists now able to make an easy comparison without the complication of exchange rates are naturally hoping that makers will be pressured, or embarrassed, into cutting their prices further.

Louis Schweitzer, head of the French Renault company, predicted this month that this would be so, citing greater competition and incentives to consumers to place their funds elsewhere than in motor cars, in addition to higher productivity.

Car makers sell their vehicles to dealers at prices which can be lower in countries like Denmark and Greece — countries not yet part of the euro zone — where automobiles are highly taxed, than in their own home markets.

Schweitzer said differences are around 12 per cent, but a European Commission report published in June said they can be as much as 40 per cent or more.

Constructors defend themselves by saying that direct comparisons are very difficult as vehicle specifications also vary greatly from country to country.

"We hope that the euro will bring prices down, but we are not totally confident without a real single market, and we are not there yet," a spokeswoman for a Brussels-based group of European consumers' associations said.

She stressed another obstacle facing motorists seeking a cheaper car in the country next door — that of bringing it back to find dealers at home refusing to honour warranties and after-sales service.

Gaetan Toulemonde, a vehicle market analyst with Natwest bank said that all prices would not necessarily find their lowest level in the euro zone. They could end up halfway between the lowest and highest, depending on such questions as factory output.

Toulemonde said that European factories were only producing at 70 per cent of their capacity, generating a fierce price war. "The fall in prices will continue until one constructor decides it cannot go on and closes a factory — then prices will stabilise again."

Some analysts even envisage an increase in average car prices in the euro zone.

"Manufacturers' prices are generally highest in their domestic markets, where their sales are also greatest," noted merchant bank Lehman Brothers. This helps to preserve profits but also sustains average prices.

Schweitzer for his part stressed that Renault now had to realise profits all over Europe, while in the old days it made money in few countries apart from France.

King's recovery, return on Tuesday boosts Amman Financial Market

AMMAN (R) — Jordan's shares rose Saturday in active pre-holiday trade on a wave of local investor optimism over His Majesty King Hussein's homecoming after his successful treatment for cancer, dealers said.

The official Amman Financial Market (AFM) 60-share index rose 0.87 per cent to 176.03 points in locally driven turnover of 1.06 million dinars (\$1.5 million).

Dealers said local investor optimism Saturday ahead of the 'Eid Al-Fitr' feast was given a boost by King Hussein's expected return next

Tuesday after a six-month absence abroad.

"The market was given a psychological boost by the return of King Hussein amid hopes of a market rebound after the 'Eid holiday,'" said Husam Al-Hanbali, a broker.

The stock market, which normally operates a five-day trading week from Saturday to Wednesday, will close for business from Sunday for the 'Eid Al-Fitr' holiday and trading will resume next Saturday.

Industrial blue-chips led the broad market advances in

floor traders, speculators and brokers acting on behalf of institutional traders.

Among the busiest transactions of the day the two mining blue-chips, Arab Potash and Jordan Phosphate Mines, rose sharply by JD0.17 to JD3.57 and JD0.97 to JD1.88 respectively.

The phosphate firm's turnover of JD185,685 was the second heaviest in volume amid strong local buying triggered by hopes of a market rebound when trade resumes next Saturday.

Blue chip drug firm, Arab

ing, rose JD0.07 to JD2.95 after shares worth JD247,827 changed hands in locally driven trade.

Jordan Electric Power, a recent favourite among local speculators, rose JD0.03 to JD1.70 after shares worth JD85,136 changed hands.

Jordan Cement Factories, which began a downward slide this week after foreign fund buying petered out, also picked up, rising JD0.16 to close JD3.45 in JD94,003 worth of trade.

The cement stock had been rising up sharply since the government sold off a major

stake last November to a French cement producer.

In the generally quieter banking sector, market heavyweight Arab Bank was unchanged at JD217 after 250 shares changed hands.

Housing Bank rose a slight JD0.01 to JD2.75 in deals worth a total of JD95,285.

Gaining shares outnumbered losers by 18 to 8 and 11 stock were unchanged.

The independent Pearl

A.F.M. TRADE Saturday, 16-01-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
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BANKS			
ARAB BK	217.000	217.000	0.00%
NTL BK	1.530	1.550	+ 1.31%
CAIRO AMMAN BK	2.750	2.650	- 3.64%
BK. OF JO	1.230	1.230	0.00%
THE HOUSING BK	2.740	2.750	+ 0.36%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.640	1.670	+ 1.83%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.650	1.650	0.00%
JO. INVE. & FIN. BK	1.340	1.330	- 0.75%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.540	0.550	+ 1.85%

BANKS INDEX	283.170	point =	+0.10%
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SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.700	1.730	+ 1.76%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.750	0.810	+ 8.00%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.900	0.900	0.00%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVE. &	1.940	1.950	+ 0.52%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.170	1.180	+ 0.85%

SERVICES INDEX	111.380	point =	+0.53%
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INDUSTRY

CEMENT	3.290	3.450	+ 4.86%
PHOSPHATE	1.810	1.880	+ 3.87%
ARAB POTASH	3.400	3.570	+ 5.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.550	10.540	- 0.09%
WORSTED MILLS	5.760	5.470	- 5.03%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.880	2.950	+ 2.43%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.220	1.220	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	5.150	5.150	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.550	0.550	0.00%
JO. STEEL	0.950	0.950	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.850	1.850	0.00%
CHLORINE	1.220	1.230	+ 0.82%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.320	0.320	0.00%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABL	0.940	0.930	- 1.06%
NTL CABLE	0.630	0.640	+ 1.59%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.380	0.380	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.280	1.300	+ 1.56%
TEL-ZAY	1.320	1.300	- 2.28%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.650	0.650	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	0.980	- 2.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.450	0.450	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.690	0.700	+ 1.45%

INDUSTRY INDEX	86.900	point =	+3.13%
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PARALLEL

EXPORT BK (75	0.880	0.890	+ 1.14%
CENTRAL STORG	0.350	0.350	0.00%
UNION INVE. CORP	0.700	0.710	+ 1.43%
AL - EKBAL	0.790	0.790	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.350	0.350	0.00%
AL DAWLAH	0.580	0.580	0.00%
ARAB INVESTORS	0.950	0.950	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.410	0.430	+ 4.88%
HAMICO	0.250	0.250	0.00%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.280	0.280	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR 90	0.580	0.570	- 1.72%
UNION TOBACCO	3.000	3.000	0.00%
AL-RAZI	0.540	0.540	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.200	0.200	0.00%
INTL CERAMIC	0.390	0.390	0.00%
NUTRI DAR	0.710	0.720	+ 1.41%

GRAND INDEX	176.03	point =	+0.87%
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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Postpone a date until later in the week. You'll be too busy with career matters or cramming for a big test. If you do well, you could get an increase in your allowance or paycheck. You'll have to concentrate to succeed, but the odds are in your favour.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) A private matter needs to be resolved before you can take off on your weekend excursion. Make sure a person who's been bothering you knows where you stand. Settle the matter instead of stirring up a bigger battle. After that, the weekend looks marvellous.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You have to make your money stretch a little further, but you can learn how to do this. Talk to a Cancer or Taurus. They know all kinds of neat tricks. There are also books on the subject. If you're more comfortable learning that way, stop by the library tonight.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Somebody you trust is giving you a hard time. This is only meant to wake you up. A little confrontation is good for you once in a while. This person is actually on your side. Think of it as coaching. Make it into a very productive discussion. Don't hold anything back.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Work demands your full attention. You're hustling and busting, but you're getting a lot done. You're also making a good impression on the people in authority. You're proving you can actually do what you say you can. That's the objective, anyway, so keep at it.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Someone you love wants something that's out of the question. You may have to be the one to deliver the bad news. Be firm, but pleasant. This afternoon, set lofty goals. You've got a good chance of bringing them to completion the old-fashioned way. By working.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You and your mate could get into an argument. The topic needs to be discussed, but you don't need to get up in arms about it. The limits you're under aren't anybody's fault. You might be able to change things, but for now, you should make the best of what you've got.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're learning quickly, but you're still up against quite a challenge. Your work requires not only concentration, but also a lot of energy. Listen to an older person who's advising a different way. He or she is speaking from experience and may see something you're missing.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Work you've done recently will start to pay off. Treat yourself to a friend to a special evening. You don't have to go out to make it special, by the way. Don't plan anything for lunchtime, though. You won't have your paycheck yet.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Every one's in love with you, some more than others — one in particular, quite noticeably. You can arrange to get together at your place this evening. No need to invite the whole gang, although they may show up anyway. Better get some chips and dip on your way home.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You could be a big help later in the day, when a close friend or relative runs into a snag. You know how to deal with this problem and can pass along your expertise. Meanwhile, follow through on a promise. Something needs to be done before quitting time.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You may not realise how much your friends are doing behind the scenes to help. You may not even realise that, when people talk about you, they're saying very nice things. This evening, practice being even more proficient at what you're doing. It's working.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

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Americans clinch Sydney titles

SYDNEY (AFP) — Americans Lindsay Davenport and Todd Martin scored the first successes of the new ATP season Saturday, walking away with the honours at the Sydney International.

Martin has surprised many observers with his scintillating form this week and upset World No. 3 Alex Corretja 6-3 7-6 (7-5).

With a wide open field at the Australian Open in Melbourne next week, the 28-year-old is shaping up as a genuine contender.

In the women's final, world number one Lindsay Davenport scored a vital psychological advantage over nearest rival Martina Hingis, completely outclassing her 6-4, 6-3.

Davenport, 22, desperately wanted to win here after losing her last two clashes with the Swiss teenager, the



World No. 1 seed Lindsay Davenport of the USA returns a shot to Martina Hingis of Switzerland in the final at the Sydney International. Davenport beat Hingis in straight sets 6-4, 6-3 (AFP photo)

serving from Martin proved too much for Corretja in the first final of the day. His extra height and a bouncy surface suited to his game gave him the edge and he was into his rhythm from the first game, moving to a 4-1 lead before Corretja, the top seed, woke up.

But Martin was unstoppable, firing serves down at 189 kmph and taking the first set to love on his service game.

Better suited to five setters, Corretja fought back and pressed the right-hander all the way in a nailbiting second set that went to serve before the big American won the decisive tiebreak 7-6.

It was Martin's second Sydney triumph and his eighth career title.

"I had to be as aggressive as I possibly could which meant a lot of work for me



Sweden's Thomas Enqvist hits a backhand return on the way to winning the final of the Kooyong Classic against Australian and hometown favourite Mark Philippoussis in Melbourne. Enqvist won the final in straight sets 6-4, 6-1 in the round-robin tournament, which the top players use as a warm-up event for the 1999 Australian Open which starts 18 January (AFP photo)

Enqvist blasts Philippoussis away in Kooyong Classic final

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Sweden's Thomas Enqvist will take an eight-match winning streak into next week's Australian Open after he smashed Mark Philippoussis in the final of the Kooyong Tennis Classic here Saturday.

The World No. 18, playing at peak confidence, took just 52 minutes to blast the defending titleholder off the Kooyong court, 6-4, 6-1.

"I feel really confident at the moment, I'm hitting the ball well and it's just perfect preparation for the Australian Open," said Enqvist, who is riding high after winning the Australian Hardcourt Championship in Adelaide last week.

"I'm not the favourite for the Australian Open just because I won three matches here," he said.

"It's important for me to get a lot of matches and my confidence to beat players of this calibre."

Philippoussis said the

final turned away from him when he missed a short forehand at 4-5 down, game point, which would have levelled the first set.

"That would have made it 5-5, kept the pressure on, anything could have happened, but after that Thomas started cruising, he got some confidence and there was no stopping him, little points like that can mean a match," said Philippoussis.

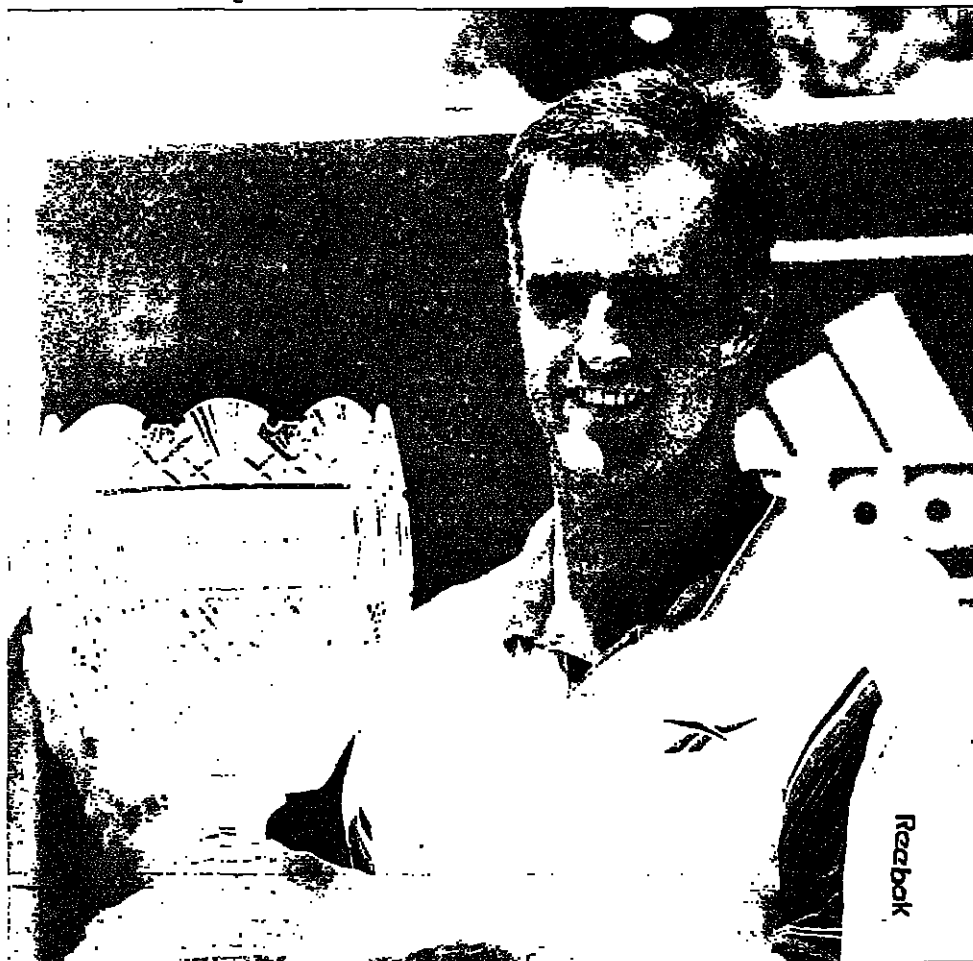
Philippoussis, who could face Enqvist in the Australian Open quarter-finals, said of the Swede: "Thomas is playing some great tennis at the moment, I take my hat off to him, he's hitting the ball extremely clean and he's a very dangerous player."

Enqvist, who faces American practice partner Michael Gambill in the first round of the Open, is in the same quarter of the draw as Patrick Rafter, Michael Chang and Philippoussis.

Enqvist's lead-in form will have some of his seeded opponents feeling uneasy especially in the early rounds, considering he is only two ranking positions outside the top-16 seedings.

Enqvist missed almost three months' tennis last year following surgery to remove a small bone chip from his right ankle, but his high expectations for the Australian Open.

"I've been beating all the top players, so I know I have the capability of beating everybody in the game," said Enqvist, whose best grand slam performance came at the 1996 Australian Open where he reached the quarter-finals. "I know it's a big step to take to win seven matches at a grand slam, but I feel I can play that well, hopefully I can do that over the next two weeks here."



World No. 16-ranked player Todd Martin of the USA holds the trophy after winning the final and beating Alex Corretja at the Sydney International tennis tournament. Martin beat Corretja 6-3, 7-6 (AFP photo)



Alex Corretja of Spain laments the loss of another point in the men's final against Todd Martin of the USA at the Sydney International (AFP photo)

reigning Australian Open champion, and will go to Melbourne for the season's first grand slam a clear favourite.

She immediately signalled her intentions, breaking the Hingis serve to take the opening game of the first set.

The youngster struck back to level at 1-1 before Davenport outclassed her opponent with some vintage

tennis to race to a 5-1 lead. Hingis, 18, had a mini-recovery, fighting her way to 5-4 before Davenport's rock-solid baseline play secured the set in 33 minutes.

In hot and blustery conditions, the second set went to serve until Davenport broke to take a 3-2 lead.

Hingis appeared sluggish as Davenport came back from 40-love down to break

with a classic cross court winner in the final game to sealing the match — and her 20th career title — in less than an hour.

"I never felt that I had control of what I was doing today, I was always one-step behind," said Hingis. "It was strange for me because I usually have control and I didn't know how to get out of it. Very few players put me under that sort of trou-

ble. "She served really well and her return put me under a lot of pressure," Davenport said her triumph was a great confidence booster.

"It's never easy to win in two sets against Martina and I'm excited and looking forward to Melbourne. I hope we meet again in the final."

Before a 7,000 capacity centre court crowd power

and fortunately every ball I mistook in the first set went in and in the second every ball he hit cleanly didn't hurt me too bad," Corretja, 24, was upbeat about his form. "Right now I feel really happy about it because I've been playing really good tennis over the last couple of months already and it was great just to start the year with a final," he said.

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NORTH
♠ A Q 4
♥ A 3 2
♦ Q 4
♣ Q 10 6 2

WEST
♠ 10 8 6 3
♥ Q J 7 5
♦ 8 5
♣ A J 9

EAST
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♦ 9 3 2
♣ 8

SOUTH
♠ 7 2
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♦ A K J 10 7
♣ K 7 5 4 3

The bidding: WEST 1♣, WEST 2NT, WEST 3♠, WEST 4♠, WEST 5♠, WEST 6♠, WEST 7♠, WEST 8♠, WEST 9♠, WEST 10♠, WEST 11♠, WEST 12♠, WEST 13♠, WEST 14♠, WEST 15♠, WEST 16♠, WEST 17♠, WEST 18♠, WEST 19♠, WEST 20♠, WEST 21♠, WEST 22♠, WEST 23♠, WEST 24♠, WEST 25♠, WEST 26♠, WEST 27♠, WEST 28♠, WEST 29♠, WEST 30♠, WEST 31♠, WEST 32♠, WEST 33♠, WEST 34♠, WEST 35♠, WEST 36♠, WEST 37♠, WEST 38♠, WEST 39♠, WEST 40♠, WEST 41♠, WEST 42♠, WEST 43♠, WEST 44♠, WEST 45♠, WEST 46♠, WEST 47♠, WEST 48♠, WEST 49♠, WEST 50♠, WEST 51♠, WEST 52♠, WEST 53♠, WEST 54♠, WEST 55♠, WEST 56♠, WEST 57♠, WEST 58♠, WEST 59♠, WEST 60♠, WEST 61♠, WEST 62♠, WEST 63♠, WEST 64♠, WEST 65♠, WEST 66♠, WEST 67♠, WEST 68♠, WEST 69♠, WEST 70♠, WEST 71♠, WEST 72♠, WEST 73♠, WEST 74♠, WEST 75♠, WEST 76♠, WEST 77♠, WEST 78♠, WEST 79♠, WEST 80♠, WEST 81♠, WEST 82♠, WEST 83♠, WEST 84♠, WEST 85♠, WEST 86♠, WEST 87♠, WEST 88♠, WEST 89♠, WEST 90♠, WEST 91♠, WEST 92♠, WEST 93♠, WEST 94♠, WEST 95♠, WEST 96♠, WEST 97♠, WEST 98♠, WEST 99♠, WEST 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Jordanians set to make big challenge in UAE Rally

DUBAI (J.T.) — With the ADNOC FOD UAE International Rally set to give the 1999 FIA Middle East Championship a cosmopolitan start next month, a wave of optimism is coming from Jordan where six drivers are preparing to lead the foreign legion's assault in Abu Dhabi.

A host of top drivers from across the Middle East and overseas are confirmed for the season's curtain-raiser, and the six-car Jordanian team forms the largest foreign contingent to have represented a single country at the UAE event.

With its own championship round firmly established as one of the leading events in the Middle East series, Jordan is a hotbed for motor sport, reflected in the numbers now looking to compete regularly in rallies across the region.

All five drivers who competed in December's climax to last year's championship in Dubai will be on the starting ramp in Abu Dhabi on February 18, along with Ahmad Al Daoud, who is a genuine prospect in the Group N class for production cars after finishing fifth overall in the UAE event three years ago.

Heading the Jordanian charge is 1997 national champion Mohammad Al Daoud, Ahmad's elder brother, whose co-driver, Khaled Zakaria, is a two-time winner of the national co-drivers' title.

"All the drivers and co-drivers had a meeting recently and there was a lot of optimism expressed for the season ahead," said Zakaria. "Most drivers are serious about competing in as many rounds of the Middle East Championship as possible this year, and I can see one or two Jordan cars making an impact."

The ADNOC FOD UAE International Rally, held under the patronage of Sheikh

Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is co-sponsored by Mina Zayed, Al-Masood Co., Taxi Al Ghazal, Abu Dhabi National Hotels Co., Ford, Danka Kodak, and GTS Recovery, while the rally headquarters is based at the Abu Dhabi Hilton, the official hotel.

Zakaria's Dubai outing with Al Daoud last month ended with engine failure on the first stage, but two of his countrymen, cousins Bashar and Faris Bustami, clinched top ten finishes. The two other drivers returning to the UAE, Lee Dunn and Ammar Haddad, also failed to finish in Dubai.

"It was Bashar's first race back after a long injury lay-off and quite an achievement for him to finish sixth, while Faris is a very smooth driver and will complete almost every race he starts because he is a lot steadier than most of us," said Zakaria.

The Jordanians are all entered in the Group N category for production cars, a title won last season by the UAE's Sheikh Abdullah Al Qassimi, who has vowed to hold on to his first crown in the regional series.

"Qassimi is obviously the man to beat and was a worthy champion last season, but if any of us can consistently finish the rallies throughout the year in good positions, I think it could be close at the end of the season," said Zakaria.

As the countdown continues to the 1999 ADNOC FOD UAE International Rally, all the latest developments can be followed on the event's official web site, located at www.atcuuae.com/uaerally.

The two-day rally covers approximately 800kms, of which 280kms are special stages.

USOC official steps down over Salt Lake scandal

SALT LAKE CITY (AFP) — Alfredo La Mont, a United States senior director of international relations, stepped down Friday, the latest victim of the Salt Lake Olympic bid bribery scandal.

A statement from USOC president Dick Schultz said La Mont worked with former Salt Lake organizing committee president Tom Welch in a capacity that proved to be a conflict of interest with his USOC duties.

Information about La Mont's actions has been turned over to a Justice Department probe of the scandal that has led to a federal grand jury being called to hear evidence next week on tax fraud and bribery charges.

The USOC, International Olympic Committee and an independent ethics panel formed by organizers are also looking into cash payments and lavish gifts given to IOC members in exchange for votes to make Salt Lake host of the 2002 Winter Games.

Two top organizing committee executives have already stepped down due to the investigation and the IOC has sent letters to 13 of its members seeking explanations for actions in connection with the bid committee.

La Mont resigned after he informed the USOC of "a previously undisclosed business relationship with the Salt Lake Olympic Committee" through Welch, the statement said.

"We concluded Mr. La Mont's activities, which he indicated he pursued independent of his USOC responsibilities, nonetheless constituted a conflict of interest."

La Mont had knowledge of and dealings with Latin American IOC members.

Olympics scandal opens Pandora's box on Nagano bid

TOKYO (AFP) — The Olympic bribery inquiry in Salt Lake City has opened a Pandora's box of allegations here with reports claiming Saturday Nagano showered IOC members with lavish gifts to win the 1998 Winter Olympics.

The Nagano Olympics bidding committee spent two to three million yen (\$27,000) for entertaining the International Olympic Committee (IOC) members when they visited the Japanese city between March 1989 and May 1991, the Mainichi Shimbun said.

The committee paid round-trip tickets not only for IOC members, but also for some of their wives and friends and booked them into extravagant Japanese-style hotels equipped with hot spring baths.

The daily said the committee chartered a helicopter that cost 600,000 yen per flight for IOC members to see

Olympics sites. Entertainment given by the committee stretched to IOC members' trips to Japan's ancient capital Kyoto, and their shopping in Tokyo's Akihabara district, which abounds with shops selling electronic and computer goods.

Officials from the committee and Japanese volunteers accompanied members during the Kyoto and shopping trips, the daily said.

Of 2.5 billion yen in its bidding expenses, the committee spent some 1.1 billion yen on entertaining IOC members, it said.

The Asahi Shimbun said the committee also gave IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch a Japanese painting worth two to three million yen.

In addition, the daily said gifts given to IOC members included Kimonos, pearl brooches, scarves, necktie pins, cameras, CD players and music boxes.

The committee said in the Asahi

Shimbun that these items were within the range of an IOC rule stipulating that gifts should not exceed \$200 in value.

As for the high-priced Japanese painting, Junichi Yamaguchi, former external affairs chief of the committee, told the Mainichi Shimbun the painting was "a donation of good will."

Financial details on the committee's bid efforts may never become known to the public since Yamaguchi ordered the city of Nagano to destroy its account book.

"Some IOC members did not want (the public) to know the mere fact that they had visited Japan," Yamaguchi was quoted by the paper as saying.

He ordered the account book destroyed because "once facts on (entertainment) surfaced, it would cause trouble," the paper quoted.

Nine under threat of sack — Samaranch

GENEVA (AFP) — International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch gave a strong hint on Saturday that nine members of the IOC will be asked to resign over sleaze allegations, but hinted that four other implicated officials will escape dismissal.

The IOC president said: "In nine cases the facts appear to be serious. For the other four it is not a hanging offence. They have all received letters asking for an explanation. Sacking is the sanction that would apply to the most serious cases."

Samaranch said that the worst of the crisis provoked by the ongoing cur-

ruption-scandal linked to Salt Lake City's successful bid for the 2002 Winter Games will be over in a week.

Samaranch also confirmed that the American city would definitely stage the 2002 Games and said the IOC would help the organizers out if sponsors decided to withdraw their support.

The IOC will announce the preliminary findings of the report into the affair on January 24 and Samaranch has already pledged that anyone guilty of wrongdoing will be asked to resign.

Samaranch said: "Everyone is waiting for the decisions we will announce on January 24. If we show our willingness to

really clean ourselves up then the most serious part of the crisis will be over.

"On that day we cannot sack, incriminated members, we can only suspend them. But I am calling, as I have the power to do, an extraordinary general meeting (of the IOC) in Lausanne (Switzerland) on March 17 and 18 when the sacking decisions will be taken."

"The quicker we turn the page the better," said Samaranch, who has been IOC president for 18 years.

The former Spanish diplomat made it clear that there was no question he would stand down, saying: "While the course we are set on remains difficult, I am needed at the head of

the IOC now more than ever. We must steer out of this storm and take the IOC boat to calmer waters."

Samaranch also said the IOC executive commission would reveal on January 23 which venues were the most likely to reach the final stages in the bid for the 2006 winter games.

The winning candidate will be announced at Seoul in South Korea in June under a new system developed by the IOC as a reaction to the sleaze scandal.

There are five candidates for the 2006 games, Zakopane (Poland), Turin (Italy), Sion (Switzerland), Poprad Patry (Slovakia) and Helsinki-Lahiti-Lillehammer (Finland and Norway).



French Jean Louis Schlesser and his buggy in action on his way to Nouakchott. Spanish Jose-Maria Servia won the stage, but Schlesser remains the overall leader after the 14th stage of the Dakar Rally between Atar and Nouakchott (AFP photo)

Potent Minnesota offence loses top threat

MINNEAPOLIS (AFP) — Jake Reed, a top receiver for Minnesota's record-setting offence, will miss Sunday's American football playoff semi-final against Atlanta with an injured hamstring.

Reed, who returned to the Vikings' lineup last week after surgery, suffered the injury in last Sunday's 41-21 victory over Arizona.

"He was unable to practice this week because of the hamstring," said Vikings coach Dennis Green today. "If we have a player who is unable to perform at a high level of intensity we prefer to go to the next player."

That means Matthew Hatchette or Chris Walsh will see duty beside top receivers Randy Moss and Cris Carter as favored targets of Randall Cunningham, the National Football League's top-rated passer.

Reed underwent surgery November 24 to repair a herniated disc before working his way back to the lineup.



Vice-champion of the 98 rallies Carlos Sainz participates in his Toyota Corolla WRC at the practice for the 67th Monte Carlo rally. The rally is scheduled 17 to 20 January (AFP photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Amavisca to join R. Santander

MADRID (AFP) — Spanish international midfielder Jose Emilio Amavisca is set to move from Real Madrid to Spanish first division rivals Racing Santander after agreeing a 2 1/2-year contract, he said Saturday. Amavisca, 27, has been frozen out of first-team opportunities this season after failing to find favour with Real's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink. Racing Santander will pay around \$1.5 million for Amavisca, who joined Real Madrid from Valladolid in 1994.

Alex Popov to get back in the pool

SYDNEY (AFP) — Olympic gold medalist and world record holder Alex Popov said Saturday he would be back in the pool inside a week after undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his knee. The 26-year-old Russian was forced to watch a World Cup short course meet in Sydney from the stands with a heavily bandaged knee after undergoing surgery Friday. Popov, who trains at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra, said he planned to avoid cycling and gym work for six weeks but would be back in the pool within a week. "It's a bit swollen, but not too painful," Popov said of his knee. "They spent a bit of time cleaning it up. ... There were no major tears, which was good." Popov said his knee troubles, ongoing since he dislocated his knee cap when he was 15, had become worse over the previous six months. "It might have been on the way but I didn't notice it," Popov said. "I'm not looking for any excuses. I hope it will help me to swim better with my knee fixed." He also joked that bad fortune seemed to strike him every two years. "In 1994, I had my appendix out, in 1996, there was the knife (Popov was stabbed by a watermelon seller in Moscow) and now this," he said.

Rey-Bellet completes 2nd win

ST ANTON, Austria (AFP) — Corinne Rey-Bellet of Switzerland completed a remarkable double when she won the World Cup women's Super-G race here on Saturday. Rey-Bellet earlier scored her first World Cup win in seven years by taking out the downhill race in the morning. In the Super-G, Rey-Bellet clocked 1min 23.18sec to finish ahead of Austrians Alexandra Meissnitzer, who was 0.17sec back and Michaela Dorfmeister, who was 0.41 behind.

Bulls name Tim Floyd coach

CHICAGO (R) — The post-Michael Jordan era began in Chicago on Friday as the Bulls officially named Tim Floyd coach.

The Bulls hired the former Iowa State coach as director of basketball operations in July with Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf saying Floyd would become coach if Phil Jackson could not be coaxed into returning.

As expected, Jackson, who resigned after guiding the Bulls to their sixth NBA title in eight seasons, had no desire to come back and the Bulls turned to their coach-in-waiting.

Floyd inherits a Bulls team with a most uncertain future and massive rebuilding in the cards.

Jordan's departure was a likely prelude to the exit of teammate Scottie Pippen, a member of all six championship teams.

Dennis Rodman and Luc Longley, starters on the Bulls' last three title teams, also are free to join other clubs, as are backups Steve Kerr, Bill Wennington and Joe Kleine.

The Bulls have just four players under contract — Toni Kukoc, Ron Harper, Randy Brown and Keith Booth.

"No other coach has had to step into a situation quite like the one here," Bulls vice president of basketball operations Jerry Krause said.

"It will be tough following a coach and a team like

we've had and beginning a career under the odd challenges of this season," added Krause.

Floyd has a college coaching career record of 243-130 over 12 years with five NCAA Tournament appearances.

"I'm certainly looking forward to getting back to coaching," said Floyd, who will relinquish his front office post. "I've learned how much the fans in Chicago love their basketball and love their Bulls."

"As we begin a new chapter together, the fans can be sure that I will commit every ounce of my energy and do my best."



German Sven Fischer on his way to take the lead in the overall Biathlon World Cup standings during the men's 10km sprint at the World Cup event in Ruhpolding. Alexei Aidarov of Belarus clocked 24min 42.6sec to win ahead of Sylvest Glimsdal of Norway and Fredrik Kuoppa of Sweden. Fischer came in tenth (AFP photo)

Kjus wins World Cup downhill

WENGEN, Switzerland (AFP) — Lasse Kjus of Norway won Saturday's World Cup men's downhill race here — his third World Cup downhill triumph of the season.

Kjus clocked 2min 25.10sec to finish ahead of Austrians Hannes Trinkl, who was 0.56sec in arrears, and Hans Knauss, who was 0.57 back.

Kjus, 28, who had been outstanding in training for the event, combined speed and superb balance as he triumphed in impressive style.

It was his 10th World Cup victory overall and the sixth World Cup downhill triumph. Earlier this season, he scored victories at Val d'Isere and Val Gardena and he also had a second-place finish at a second race at Val Gardena. Kjus, the Olympic combined gold medalist in 1994 and downhill silver medalist last year at Nagano, has not missed a downhill podium finish this season, although he missed the Bormio event with bronchitis, and increased his lead in the downhill standings.

"This is an important win for me," said the bearded Kjus. "It means I am feeling very relaxed going into next month's world championships (in Vail, Colorado)."

Overall World Cup leader Hermann Maier of Austria, troubled by a back injury, had to settle for fourth spot on Saturday but maintained his lead in the standings.

Iraq calls for new Eastern grouping to balance Western blocs

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Saturday called on Eastern countries to set up a new grouping to defend their interests and counterbalance the existing Western alliances led by the United States.

In a televised address, he said Iraq "feels it is necessary that an institutional gathering be established with agreed rules and conventions by willing member states in the world, starting with the Orient."

The president, speaking on Arab News Network satellite television channel, said such a grouping would provide a counterbalance to NATO and other Western alliances, but that it would not be aimed at challenging anybody in particular.

"Nevertheless it should be ready to protect its member states and rightly defend the security and the interests of its members as well as international security in accordance with correct humanitarian standards," Saddam said.

"Furthermore, some other factors for this move lie in the fact that America, Britain and Zionism... with all those who assist and cooperate with them, have become a threat to the security and stability of the world."

The president, dressed in a civilian suit with the Iraqi flag behind him, urged all Arab countries to join this grouping, saying Baghdad was ready for a dialogue with all interested parties to formulate a charter.

Earlier, Iraq marked the eighth anniversary of the Gulf War with large anti-American demonstrations as tension remained high nearly one month after U.S.-British missile strikes.

Thousands of Iraqis marched in the rain in two separate demonstrations in Baghdad, cursing U.S. President Bill Clinton and swearing their loyalty to President Saddam Hussein on dozens of banners.

"Clinton the coward, go look for girls," the protesters shouted, in a reference to the sexual scandals that have rocked the White House.

The two demonstrations are the first of a series planned to mark the anniversary on Sunday of the start of the 1991 Gulf War to evict Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The final demonstration will be a march of Arab students through Baghdad on Saturday night.

The march will coincide with the launch eight years ago of the air campaign by a U.S.-led coalition, which preceded a

ground attack on the Iraqi troops in Kuwait. The Iraqis, which invaded in August 1990, were ejected from the emirate on Feb. 26, 1991.

Anti-Saudi and Kuwaiti slogans were also yelled by the demonstrators: "Shame on those among the Arabs who maintain the embargo" imposed on Iraq by the United Nations after the invasion.

Both countries allowed their territory to be used by the United States and Britain during the intense four-day missile strikes on Iraq in December, dubbed Operation Desert Fox.

The Iraqi press meanwhile continued to celebrate the "Mother of all Battles," the Iraqi description of the Gulf War.

"The mother of all battles led by Saddam allowed us to meet the aggression," the Al Iraq daily said on its front page.

Iraq has remained defiant in the face of international pressure. On Friday it rejected a U.S. proposal to raise the cap on its oil exports within the framework of the U.N. oil-for-food programme.

It has rejected a Saudi proposal to lift crippling economic sanctions under strict supervision to exclude anything with a military use.



WHAT FLOATS ON WATER?: A farmer herds hundreds of ducks in the Cu Chi district 30 kilometres west of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. All moving vehicles must yield the right of way as daily outings of flocks of ducks are ubiquitous in rural Vietnam (AP photo)

Clinton sees new government as best solution to Iraq problem

'Declaration of Palestinian state would be catastrophe'

BEIRUT (Agencies) — U.S. President Bill Clinton said in an interview with an Arab newspaper published Saturday that the best way out of the Iraq crisis would be a change of government in Baghdad.

"As long as Saddam Hussein remains in power, the Middle East will be preoccupied by this conflict... and the Iraqi people will remain under the yoke of a criminal police state with no hope of normalisation," the London-based Saudi newspaper Asharq Al Awsat quoted Clinton as saying.

"In the long run, the best way of overcoming this destructive crisis is the formation of a new government in Baghdad which would better represent the Iraqi people and be ready to carry out its commitments towards the international community," he said.

In the interview, conducted

on Monday, Clinton said he was "ready to help the new Iraq by working to ease the economic sanctions and the cancellation of debts" incurred by President Saddam.

He stressed his willingness to support the Iraqi opposition, but warned that change would be neither quick nor easy.

He made it clear no U.S. ground troops would become involved, but said the United States was drawing up a list of opposition groups deserving of aid, which would be submitted to Congress at the end of the month.

The list would be the basis for the distribution of \$97 million the United States decided in December to allocate for "the liberation of Iraq."

Clinton also expressed support for a Saudi proposal to ease sanctions to ensure the Iraqi people have what they

need for "a decent life," while ensuring President Saddam does not control oil revenues.

"The fact that Iraq turned down this proposal reveals [Saddam's] true intentions," he said.

Clinton also said in an interview that he was opposed to a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state, warning that it could lead to catastrophe.

"For years, the United States has held that negotiations, and not individual acts, are the only acceptable solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Asharq Al Awsat quoted Clinton as saying.

"That's why it's our duty to oppose any unilateral declaration of a state or any other measure taken in isolation by one party outside the negotiating process and which could harm that process," he said, in an interview also conducted on

Monday.

"We are making maximum efforts to strengthen negotiations on the final status [of the Palestinian territories] and believe that those who think they can adopt unilateral measures during the transitory period are opening up a path to catastrophe," he said.

Asked about the fugitive Saudi millionaire Osama Ben Laden, who is accused by the United States of being behind the August bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa, Clinton called on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to expel him "as soon as possible to the United States or elsewhere to face trial."

"The fact that the Taliban continue to give him and his organisation shelter makes them accomplices," Clinton added.

Group objects to restaurant's use of short employee

MILWAUKEE (AP) — An organisation of short people is complaining about a Mexican restaurant sending a 172-cent employee around to serve customers' chips and salsa from his sombrero. Anthony Soares, vice president of public relations for Little People of America in New York City, called the stunt humiliating. "It's horrifying to realise that people are still being exploited for their size," he said. Nacho Mama's restaurant, which opened Wednesday, features Steve Vento serving snacks from his hat. "We've had only one person saying that it was degrading," Vento said. "I told her, I don't remember anyone putting you in charge. We're nothing more than a handful of people having a good time."

Thieves steal 60,000 suspect condoms

SAN JOSE (AFP) — Thieves who stole 60,000 condoms when they broke into a van near here may have been stiffed, the van's owner says. Geraldine Kinyon, who owned the van, warned the slippery thieves not to use the condoms because some were past their expiration date. "Someone might get pregnant or catch AIDS, or something terrible," Kinyon said. "It's upsetting to think about." The condoms, in red boxes labeled "Red Hot Condoms," were in plain foil wrappers with a way for anyone to know which were still good and which were not, she said.

'Interior decorator' burglar arrested

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The "interior decorator" burglar who could not abide what he deemed as poor taste in the homes of some of his victims, was finally arrested but not before felony furniture rearranging. After breaking into homes in Los Angeles and San Francisco, police arrested Ataya Rysay, 31, for burglary after he was found with a van at the home of a North Hollywood man, and tried to flee, police said. He reportedly broke into homes and before leaving with valuables he often cleaned clothes, fixed dinner, sat by a fireplace with a glass of wine and rearranged furniture.

Costly lunch after Euro bloop

CAGLIARI (R) — An Italian man ended up paying 20 times more than he should have for a New Year's lunch with his wife after a bloop by his bank converted the cost in euros. Italian news agency ANSA reported on Saturday that Massimo Oroglio paid 100,000 lire — some 51 euros — for lunch with his wife on Jan. 3, paying by debit card. But to his horror, the following week when he went to the bank to ask for a balance, he discovered 1,000 euros had been debited from his account instead — equivalent to 10 million lire, and 20 times the cost of the meal. The error was rectified after receipt was produced.

Blind man convicted of drunken driving

NASHVILLE (AP) — A blind man who slammed his car into a tree after taking his first steps out for a spin has been fined \$513 for drunken driving. Herbert Council, 39, said he thought he knew the road in Murfreesboro well enough to navigate them with the help of friend Jeffrey Hamilton. The friend Jeffrey Hamilton said after having a few drinks on Dec. 10, the pair put the car down on Hamilton's driveway in the rain. Council missed a sharp left turn and slammed head-on into a tree, wrapping up his car. Council, who was wearing a seat belt, was not injured. "I never let a blind man drive," one resident told

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NEWS IN BRIEF

'Mordechai met secretly with Palestinians'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai has met secretly over the past two weeks with several leading Palestinian officials, including PLO Deputy Mahmoud Abbas, public radio said Saturday. The encounters, aimed at maintaining relations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority on security and anti-terrorism measures despite the freeze in the peace process, were held with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's approval, it said. Mordechai met Abbas on Thursday and previously held talks with Palestinian preventative security chiefs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Jibril Rajub and Mohammad Dahlan.

Cabinet accuses millionaire over settlements

RAMALLAH (AFP) — The Palestinian cabinet accused Jewish American multimillionaire Irving Moskowitz on Saturday of provocation over his funding of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories. "Irving Moskowitz is waging a campaign of colonisation and gross provocation which represents a direct challenge to the Palestinian people," said a cabinet statement issued after a meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah. "Israeli extremists and settlers are taking part in this operation under the cover of the election campaign in Israel by speeding up the settlement of Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem and other areas in the Palestinian territories," it said. The cabinet, chaired by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, called on the Israeli government to put an end to "these aggressions and provocations which are raising the ire of the Palestinian people."

PNA to release political prisoners at 'Eid

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) will release a number of political prisoners to mark the festival of 'Eid al-Fitr which ends the fasting month of Ramadan, officials said here Saturday. A special committee is currently preparing the list of those to be freed in the next 24 hours, they said. Dozens of members of opposition movements, particularly the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Islamic Jihad, are being held in Palestinian jails in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Palestinian Legislative Council had requested the release of prisoners for the festival, which falls on Sunday or Monday. Hamas sources in Gaza confirmed that detainees were to be freed.

'Death threats against Iranian journalist'

TEHRAN (AFP) — A shadowy Islamic fundamentalist group has threatened to kill a liberal Iranian journalist following a spate of murders of dissidents and writers, newspapers reported Saturday. Reza Alijani, editor of Iran-e-Farda (Tomorrow's Iran) monthly, has received several phone calls from a group describing itself as Fedayeen (Devotees) of Pure Islam, threatening to kill him if he gave interviews to foreign media, they said. "After Pouryandeh, it will be your turn and if you talk to another foreign radio station, it will be your last time," the caller warned, referring to Mohammad Pouryandeh, one of the writers kidnapped and murdered last month. The magazine's director, Ezzatollah Sahabi, has informed Interior Minister Abdul Vahed Musavi Lari of the threat.

Turkish troops kill four Kurdish rebels

DIYARBAKIR (R) — Turkish troops killed four Kurdish rebels in clashes overnight in the wake of a guerrilla rocket attack on an oil refinery in the southeast, security officials said on Saturday. Two Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) fighters were killed in a military operation launched after the attack on the refinery in the province of Batman, the officials told Reuters. Two guards were killed and three wounded late on Friday when one of the rockets fired by the rebels hit a sentry post. One of the guards died of his wounds during the night. In a separate operation, two PKK guerrillas were killed in fighting near the town of Nusaybin close to the border with Syria.

Afghan opposition reports taking township

ISLAMABAD (R) — Afghanistan's opposition alliance said on Saturday it had taken a strategic township in the central province of Bamian as it accused the ruling Taliban militia of bombing residential areas in the northeast. The opposition forces took the Yakaulang township on Saturday morning after a few hours of fighting, pouring into it from surrounding hills, an opposition spokesman, Abdullah, told Reuters by satellite telephone from northern Afghanistan. There was no independent confirmation of Abdullah's report, which said repeated Taliban attacks to recapture Yakaulang failed while militia air raids killed 11 civilians in the area.

Hard-liners disrupt pro-Khatami cleric's sermon

TEHRAN (R) — Stone-throwing Iranian Islamists disrupted a sermon by a top moderate cleric backing President Mohammad Khatami, amid a bitter row over a spate of killings of dissidents, newspapers reported on Saturday.

The daily Salam said some 100 activists cut off loud-speaker chords and threw sticks, stones and metal rods at a podium where Ayatollah Jalaluddin Taheri was preparing to deliver his sermon at Friday prayers in the central city of Isfahan.

"When an iron rod was thrown at Ayatollah Taheri, his bodyguard fired blank rounds in the air, but the agitators kept throwing stones and shoes. [So] Ayatollah Taheri left the podium," Salam said.

The activists chanted slogans backing the conservative-run intelligence ministry, which has been at the centre of the row after admitting that some of its agents were involved in the murders, and calling for Taheri's resignation, it said.

Taheri had earlier called for a purge of the ministry, saying "years of mismanagement" had paved the way for the murder spree in which two outspoken dissidents and at least two liberal writers died. Taheri's office issued a statement accusing police and security forces of standing by during Friday's disturbance and "sometimes cooperating with the agitators," Salam said.

Taheri, the only big-city Friday prayer leader who openly backs Khatami's liberal reforms, has also provoked the wrath of hard-liners by speaking out against their attacks on Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, Iran's most prominent dissident cleric.

Top presidential aide Riek Machar, who heads the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF), a coalition of breakaway southern factions which

Sudanese FM in peace talks with SPLA leader — Libya

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail met southern rebel leader John Garang here for talks aimed at ending the country's 16-year-old civil war, the official Libyan news JANA reported Saturday.

"Libya recently held contacts between the warring parties in Sudan and, to this end, Colonel Garang came to Libya where a meeting was held between the protagonists with a view to establishing a mechanism to settle the conflict," it said.

The news agency did not specify the date of the meeting but the pro-government Khartoum daily Alwan reported Wednesday that Ismail had travelled to Libya the previous day for a meeting with Garang.

Garang arrived in Cairo Wednesday evening where a spokesman for his Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) denied that he had met any Sudanese officials during his stay in Libya.

Top presidential aide Riek Machar, who heads the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF), a coalition of breakaway southern factions which

signed a peace deal with Khartoum in 1997, also took part in the talks with Garang, JANA said.

Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi also received Ismail and Machar "as part of Libya's efforts to find a settlement to the dispute between the Sudanese government and the SPLA and to reinforce the stability of this fraternal Arab and African country."

SPLA spokesman Rashid Babiker told AFP in Cairo Thursday that Garang had also held talks with the Libyan leader.

The reports of talks between Khartoum and the SPLA came just a day after the two sides agreed to extend a ceasefire in force in certain areas of south Sudan since July last year.

Khartoum and the SPLA first agreed to extend the ceasefire in the famine hit Bahr Al Ghazal region last October. They extended it for a further three months Friday.

Tripoli has intensified its involvement in African affairs in the past 12 months, seeking to mediate in conflicts in Somalia, the Great Lakes region and Guinea Bissau.

SANAA (AP) — Five Britons detained in Yemen have been charged with intent to commit murder, a British diplomat said Saturday.

The five men were charged Friday at a police station in the southern port city of Aden, where they are being held, said British consul David Pearce.

"The men have been charged with association with armed groups, with a criminal plan to commit murder, explosion and possession of weapons," Pearce told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Aden.

He said the five men pleaded not guilty.

Yemeni authorities claim the men are linked to a militant Islamic group that kidnapped 16 Westerners on Dec. 28, four of whom died in a rescue attempt by the Yemeni army a day later.

Their lawyer denies the allegation.

The five — Mohsin Ghalain, 18, Ghulam Hussein, 25, Shahid Butt, 33, Malik Nassar Harura, 26, and Samad Ahmad, 21 —

were detained last month.

Pearce said he does not expect the case to go to trial before the end of the Muslim holidays next week.

He said he has met with all the detainees and they "all looked okay." But he said he will keep trying to meet with them on regular basis, "individually and in private."

Some of the men's supporters in Britain have accused the Yemen government of torture.

Pearce said the prosecutor general has agreed that an independent doctor examine the men to allay their family's fears.

"We are pressing for access by an independent doctor to examine the boys to make sure they are perfectly fit and we are also asking for them to be transferred to the central prison," said Pearce.

He said he had also requested that they get telephone access so they can speak with their families back home. Lawyer Badr Basunaid said last week that "confessions" purportedly linking the men to the gang that kidnapped the

Westerners were illegal.

U.S. Christian leader says Antichrist probably alive today

WILLIAMSBURG (AP) — In a speech about the concern people have over the new Millennium, a top Christian leader said the Antichrist is probably alive today and is a male Jew.

The Rev. Jerry Falwell also told about 1,500 people at a conference in Kingsport, Tennessee, on Thursday that he believes the second coming of Christ probably will be within 10 years.

"Who will the Antichrist be? I don't know. Nobody else knows," said Falwell, whose Sunday morning ser-

vices at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg are carried by television stations nationwide.

"Is he alive and here today? Probably. Because when he appears during the Tribulation period he will be a full-grown counterfeit of Christ. Of course he'll be Jewish. Of course he'll pretend to be Christ. And if in fact the Lord is coming soon, and he'll be an adult at the presentation of himself, he must be alive somewhere today."

According to the Bible, the Antichrist will spread universal evil

before the end of the world but will be conquered at the second coming of Christ.

Falwell said Friday in Williamsburg that he did not intend for his statement to be anti-Jewish. He said he meant only that the Antichrist must be Jewish because Jesus Christ was a Jew.

"If he's going to be the counterfeit of Christ, he has to be Jewish," Falwell said. "The only thing we know is he must be male and Jewish."

Rabbi James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee in New York said

the comment surprised him because he knows Falwell is a strong supporter of Israel and is not anti-Jewish.

"This is part of what I call millennial madness," Rudin said. "To single out any one man, and particularly to identify him as Jewish, plays into some latent and historical anti-Semitism from the past."

"This is very, very radioactive material. I think Christian leaders have to exercise great care because this can produce negative responses among people who are not educated in the New Testament," he said.

one resident told